LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS SHEMINI

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS SHEMINI

Published by the
Jewish Discovery Center
Institute for Jewish Studies
Copyrighted © by
Rabbi Heschel Greenberg
212 Exeter Road
Williamsville, NY 14221
716-632-0467
716-245-9520
rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. THE EIGHTH DAY
2. EIGHT IS NOT SEVEN!
3. IN THE SPOTLIGHT
4. "HE COULD HAVE SAID: 'CIRCUMCISION IS ON THE EIGHTH DAY!?'"
5. THE PARADOX OF JUDAISM
6. SUPPRESSING AND EXPRESSING
7. PROHIBITION
8. THE ANGEL'S ANGEL
9. LET IT BE KNOWN TO ALL!
10. WE'RE STILL WAITING
11. INQUIRE
12. THE KABBALAH OF FOOD
13. THE BIG FISH
14. DRINK TO RECTIFY THE DRINKING
15. FIX AND DECORATE

16. IDLE IS IDOL

17. THE FOUR SPECIES: GETTING OUT OF FOUR EXILES

18. DOUBLE DUALITY

19. 8X8

20. PARITY

21. NATURAL WINE

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Shemini* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the

capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

As will be discussed in several of the essays, the parsha Shemini is connected to Moshiach. Shemini-The eighth, is associated with the idea of transcendence. Therefore Moshiach's harp with have eight strands, as opposed to the harp in the Temple which had seven strands.

ESSAY ONE

THE EIGHTH DAY

G-d's plan for the world requires of us to choose freely to implement His Master Plan.

The world had to go through ups and downs, before the plan was delivered to us.

The world has also gone through vicissitudes to bring us to the threshold of the Messianic Age.

ESSAY ONE

THE EIGHTH DAY

Initiation

Judaism's first Temple was the Mishkan; a portable Sanctuary the Jewish nation was commanded to build about a year after their exodus from Egyptian bondage. The Mishkan was to be the place in which and from which G-d's presence in this world would be generated.

The Mishkan was finally built, but for seven consecutive days, there was to be an initiation process before it would be inaugurated. For seven days the Mishkan was assembled and then disassembled. During these seven days Moses was in charge. He instructed Aaron on the rites he would have to perform in the future as he would assume the role of Kohaim Gadol-the High Priest..

This week's parsha, Shemini, picks up at this point, and begins with the words:

> "And it came to pass on the eighth day."

The parsha continues to detail the events of this day, specifically, the fact that on this day the Mishkan was assembled for the last time, and would remain this way until their next journey.

Furthermore, it was on this eighth day that G-d responded to their efforts by having a fire descend from Heaven to consume the sacrifices they offered. This was G-d's sign that He was pleased with their efforts and that their mission was accomplished.

Commentators raise the question, why was it necessary for Aaron to go through a seven day period of initiation? More specifically, the question is, why is it important for us to know that Aaron was initiated for seven days, and only on the eighth day did G-d respond to his efforts?

The answer lies in an analysis of the way the world developed spiritually from the time Adam and Eve were introduced to the world.

The Purpose of Creation

G-d created this physical existence so that it can independently appreciate His presence, and make the world an inviting and hospitable place for Him. Physicality on its own obscures its G-dly nature. When we view a physical object we do not readily see that it exists only because of the Divine fiat that commands its existence and without which it simply would cease to be here. G-d's plan was for the world to experience a complete paradigm shift. How does this come about?

Enter Adam and Eve. With the advent of humanity, the world had the potential to realize its purpose. Only the human being can see the world either as an independent existence or one that is a manifestation of the Divine creative power.

But how were the first humans capable of knowing where and how to search for the truth of the world's existence? Adam and Eve had to be given a glimpse of the Divine reality that would set the tone for all of the future. G-d's presence was therefore made palpable at the very beginning of creation,

when the sole human inhabitants were Adam and Eve. The world was then a model of what it was meant to be in the future.

Adam and Eve, notwithstanding their exalted spiritual nature, allowed their intellectual curiosity to partake of the forbidden fruit. The result was not just their own degradation, but it also led to G-d "withdrawing" His overt presence from our physical world.

According to the Midrash, there are "seven heavens" and the *Shechinah,* the Divine presence, then departed from this world and "rose" to the first heaven. And while it was a negative result, it was, paradoxically, the agent that gave the world more independence, so that future achievements would be of our choosing and not imposed upon us.

Once the world experienced a "withdrawal" of G-dly presence, the potential for sin increased. Indeed, the transgression of Adam and Eve created the environment for their son Cain to kill Abel. When that occurred,

the Midrash relates, the Divine presence further withdrew into the second heaven.

When the generation of Enosh started to deify celestial beings, the Divine presence withdrew into the third heaven. When the world degenerated into immorality and anarchy that resulted in the flood that destroyed the world, the Divine presence withdrew into the fourth heaven. The rebellious and self-aggrandizing building of the Tower of Babel, followed by the cruelty, immorality and obscene corruption of the Sodomites, further eroded the state of G-dly presence in the world, with its withdrawal to the fifth and sixth heavens, respectively.

The final blow came with the corrupt ways of the Egyptians in the days of Abraham. This resulted in the Divine presence having the most detached and elusive relationship with our world, as it ascended to the seventh heaven.

To be sure, no physical or spatial movement of the Divine presence is being suggested. The imagery of G-d "rising" to the seventh heaven is merely a rhetorical device that

enables us to grasp the degree to which discovering the Divine in creation became elusive.

The Return of the Divine Presence

At that point, Abraham started to shine. His efforts at introducing G-d to the world and his obsession with acts of kindness, Abraham brought the Divine presence back down to the sixth heaven. Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kehos and Amram were all instrumental in bringing the Divine presence closer to the consciousness of the world by bringing the Shechinah down to the first heaven.

The final task, to bring the Divine presence to our world, was reserved for Moses and the generation that received the Torah at Sinai. The giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, however, was a temporary experience. What was the first event that dramatized and captured that final challenge of bringing the Divine presence down to earth was the construction of the Mishkan. It represented the final step, at that time, to make G-d a

palpable presence in their lives and accessible to the world.

All of this was dramatized by having a seven day period of assembling and disassembling the Mishkan, to reflect on the tenuous nature of G-d's relationship with the world that existed from the time of Adam to the time the Torah was given at Sinai and the construction of the Mishkan.

The seven days of "on and off" construction of and the service in the Mishkan was an echo of the seven generations it took for the Shechinah to return to this world.

It was on the eighth day that the Jewish people realized that G-d was here to stay.

History Repeats Itself

Chassidic masters have told us that this pattern has repeated itself in modern times. The process that leads to the Messianic Age has also gone through seven generations/stages.

The advent of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement

introduced a new light to the world. His light was said to be a foretaste of the light of Moshiach. However, it was through the efforts of his successor's disciple, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of the Chabad branch of the Chassidic movement that the Messianic energies that were introduced by the Ba'al Shem Tov and his successor, Rabbi Dov Ber (known as the Maggid of Mezritch) was made accessible to the human mind.

Through the medium of Chabad—which is an acronym for the three intellectual processes of *chochma* (conceptual knowledge) *binah* (elucidation) and *da'as* (perception)—the teachings of Chassidus that are a taste of the transcendent Messianic revelations of G-dly knowledge can seep down into our consciousness.

Our generation—the Rebbe told us in his inaugural discourse, fifty years ago—is the seventh and final generation in this process. In the Rebbe's words, we are now on the threshold between the seventh generation and the eighth, poised to witness the "heavenly fire" that will herald the coming of

Moshiach and the ultimate Age of Redemption.

ESSAY TWO

EIGHT IS NOT SEVEN!

Numbers are a language.

The number eight communicates the idea of transcendence.

ESSAY TWO

EIGHT IS NOT SEVEN!

Split!

This week's parsha begins with the words, "And it came to pass on the eighth day." It refers specifically to the dedication of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert. For seven consecutive days, Moses initiated Aaron into the High Priesthood and the service within the Mishkan. After these seven days of initiation, Moses formally dedicated the Mishkan at which time a fire descended from heaven to consume their offerings.

A question can be raised as to why the Torah divides the eight days of dedication into two separate Torah portions. The first seven days of initiation are discussed in the preceding parsha, whereas the eighth day is mentioned in the beginning of this week's parsha. Why

couldn't the Torah discuss theses eight days in one section?

Numbers in Leviticus

Numbers have meaning.

The number one symbolizes unity: one G-d, one Torah and one Israel.

The number two represents either duality (such as the two inclinations of man) or harmony (such as the two tablets).

The number three relates to the notion of synthesis of two disparate entities through which a third and new entity is created.

An example of this is the Torah itself. The Talmud associates the Torah with the number three (it is divided into three parts, given in the third month to a people divided into three etc.) because it creates the synthesis between G-d and the physical world.

The number four represents the stages of development from conception through birth, in both the physical world as well as in the spiritual world. Indeed, the entire process of

creation undergoes these four stages of development. First there is an idea (conception). The next stage is for the idea to be given some basic form. The third stage is where the basic form is allowed to mature and develop to the point that it is ready for the fourth stage of birth. Thus, we have four letters in G-d's name, to represent the process of creation which comprises four stages. And therefore Kabbalah tells us that there are four spiritual worlds that channel G-d's energy into our physical world.

The number five corresponds to the five levels of the soul and of human experience. The soul of a person can manifest itself either in action, emotions, intellect, will or delight.

The number six is the representation of space (north, south, east, west, up and down) and time (six work days of the week), without its inner spiritual dimension.

The number seven represents the totality of time and space, where the six dimensions of time and space are infused with an inner spiritual core.

If one were to take six equal objects and places them in a circle, there will be a space—equal to the size of one of the objects—in the center of this circle. Each of the six objects will touch and be touched by the one in the center. No other configuration will yield this phenomenon. This symbolizes the role of the number seven as the core and "soul" of the other six. Similarly, in the realm of time, the Shabbat is the soul and spiritual essence of the other six days of the week.

Thus, the number seven is considered to be the most beloved and cherished number, because it represents the peak of perfection. The Torah was thus given to the Jewish people after seven generations (from the Patriarch Abraham through Moses). Indeed, the Midrash underscores the sublime nature of the number seven when it states: "All sevens are beloved."

Going Beyond Perfection

On the surface it would seem that one cannot go beyond the state of divine perfection associated with the number seven.

Yet, this Torah portion speaks of the fact that the dedication of the Mishkan (portable sanctuary) occurred on the "eighth" day (i.e., after seven days of preparation).

Commentators point out that this was to represent that the divine experience that was expressed through the dedication of the Mishkan was one of the order of eight; it transcended perfection!

Indeed, the number eight is the symbol of going beyond the order—even the spiritual order—of existence that is represented by the number seven. The number eight is not just seven plus one, but it is of an entirely different order. Eight is the symbol of the miraculous and transcendent. Eight is the force that enables us to go beyond the constraints of logic and the parameters of nature.

Hence the circumcision rite occurs on the **eighth** day. Circumcision is not a rational initiation ceremony that a mature adult enters into, but it is our way of connecting an infant—and the infant, non-rational aspect of our personality—with its Creator. This

procedure reveals an inner bond between a Jew and G-d that transcends and defies logic.

Qualitative Difference

We can now understand why the dedication of the Mishkan occurred on the eighth day; the day after the seven days of initiation. The Mishkan's purpose was to house the Divine that transcends nature.

When a Jew entered the Mishkan—or the permanent Sanctuary built in Jerusalem, known as the Beit Hamikdash—he or she was exposed to the Divine that transcends the G-dly energy that one can perceive in any other part of the world. Not only did the Mishkan help to channel the awareness of the Divine throughout the creation, it also revealed an aspect of G-dliness that transcends the divine embedded within nature.

The Eight Strands of the Messianic Harp

Our sages also inform us that the harp that our ancestors used in the Temple consisted of seven strands. However, the harp that we

will be using in the third Temple, built by Moshiach, will consist of **eight** strands. Although in general terms the Mishkan already exposed us to the transcendent aspect of the Divine, nevertheless this cannot compare to the revelation that will occasion the coming of Moshiach. Hence, the harp used in the past consisted only of seven strands even though the Mishkan is associated with the eighth day, because ultimately the number eight was reached only after the process of seven.

The explanation of the above is that even when we speak of eight there are basically two ways of explaining it that reflect two dimensions of transcendence.

The first and lower level is the eight that is connected to the seven. It is like the person who reaches the realization that there is something above logic through the medium of logic itself. In this mode, the number eight is a product of seven. Seven dictates that there is an elusive eighth number.

The Messianic age will introduce a new dimension of spirituality. It will introduce us

to the number eight that totally transcends the number seven. It will be the revelation of the Divine that logic cannot demand; it is revealed from above.

Down to Earth

In more down-to-earth terms, the Messianic age will not only bring about the perfection of nature—hence it is also identified as the Sabbatical era—it will go beyond that. Moshiach will instill the order of nature with a palpable realization of the transcendent and heretofore supra-rational aspects of Divinity. Rather than using logic to reach the realization that there is something beyond logic, the transcendent aspect of G-d will manifest itself and permeate even the realm of logic.

This means that in the Messianic age the Divine reality and our own reality will coincide. We will be able to see things through the perspective of G-d.

ESSAY THREE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The more spiritual we become the more light we generate.

However, the increased spirituality also sheds more light on our imperfections.

Higher spirituality is also a higher challenge.

ESSAY THREE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Hesitation

In this week's Parsha we read of how after seven days of initiation, the Sanctuary in the desert was finally ready for its inaugural service. For seven days Moses acted as the High Priest, but on the eighth day, the responsibility of leading the services in the Sanctuary was given over to Aaron, Moses' brother.

The transference of this responsibility did not go so smoothly. Aaron was hesitant to accept the responsibility. Moses thus said to him:

> "Approach the Altar and atone for yourself and for the community."

Rashi explains that Moses' prodding of Aaron was prompted by the fact that:

> "Aaron was embarrassed and was afraid to approach. Moses therefore

> said to him, 'Why are you embarrassed? You for chosen for this!'"

Why was Aaron so reluctant to assume the High Priesthood? And if he was hesitant, why did he go along with the initiation process for the preceding seven days? He should have demurred then and not have waited for the final moment when he had to go "on stage," so to speak.

Why was Aaron Chosen?

Commentators explain that Aaron's hesitancy was motivated by his humility. And this is what Moses meant when he said "You were chosen for this," you were chosen because of "this," i.e., because of your humility.

Other commentators explain that Aaron's hesitancy was motivated by the memory of his involvement in the construction of the Golden Calf. As he approached the Altar, the Midrash states, it resembled the Golden Calf. This vision caused him to feel embarrassment and instilled within him a sense of unworthiness.

Moses' response to this fear was that, on the contrary, a person who never forgets his moral lapses is precisely the type of person G-d had in mind for the role of the High Priesthood.

However, the question still remains. Why did he not experience this feeling of humility and embarrassment when he was being initiated for the preceding seven days? Did he forget that he had a role in the construction of the Golden Calf? And if this role was unintentional, as commentators point out, why then did he feel guilty now?

A Chassidic teaching can be helpful in shedding light on what prompted Aaron's reticence on the eighth day and not earlier.

Higher Consciousness

When a person is exposed to a higher level of G-dly consciousness, it heightens the realization of one's own insignificance and the concomitant need to become a better person

Similarly, when a person reaches a higher level of spirituality, the imperfections and sins for which they have already atoned surface again and challenge the person to atone once more.

The effects of reaching a higher level is that we are then moved to revisit the past and discover the need to make amends once more for the imperfections of the past. Even if we already made amends for the past, the new awareness makes us realize that we need to deal with and remove a more subtle level of imperfection that we have not yet realized. In the long run, this helps us grow even more.

More Light, More Dirt, More Perfection

To better understand this process, we can use the analogy of light. When we have limited illumination we might only be aware of some glaring dirt on our garment and then proceed to remove it. There might still be some dirt left that is imperceptible to us now. When we shine a brighter light on ourselves, we will recognize that there are

some traces of dirt that we have not yet removed.

During the seven days of initiation, Aaron had not experienced the same intensity of G-dly light as he did on the eighth day. As was pointed out in the preceding essay, the number eight represents the transcendent aspects of G-d. When Aaron began to experience a new and unparalleled Divine revelation, represented by the number eight, his sense of unworthiness was highlighted and made more pronounced. Simultaneously, he also began to revisit his role in the construction of the Golden Calf, compelling him to dig deeper into his soul to eradicate subtler levels of imperfection that he had not been aware of until now.

Now that Aaron had made this new assessment about himself, he was **now** fully qualified to serve as High Priest, because as long as he had not had the intense light of the "eighth day" shine upon him, he could not fully rid himself of the imperfections that were left lingering from the Golden Calf.

Exponential Growth in the Messianic Age

What happened to Aaron is a portent of the experience of the Messianic Age, which is also identified with the number eight. Moshiach is identified in the Talmud as a member of an exclusive "club" of "eight princes." Another example of the role of the number eight in the future is that the harp that will be used in the future Holy Temple will consist of eight strands as compared to the seven strands of past Temples.

How does the number eight—that characterizes the Messianic Age—relate to our lives? How will it affect us? What difference does it make if the harp has seven strands or eight?

In the mystical sense we can understand that the number eight that will be revealed in the Messianic Age represents a more intense generation of G-dly light. The world will be deluged with more positive and holy energy. He question, however, is how does that translate into our lives as human beings?

Revealing and Removing the Hidden Evil

One of the greatest obstacles to growth in the present period of Galus/exile—dominated as it is by the number seven that signifies the natural order—is that we are incapable of seeing all of our imperfections. As a result, we are also obviously prevented from dealing with them. They remain buried in our subconscious and serve to stifle our growth. And while the light of Torah and Mitzvot can assist us in exposing and healing our revealed faults—as well as some faults that lie directly beneath the surface—the light we generate does not have sufficient "voltage" to discover, expose, irradiate and eradicate certain embedded and encapsulated forms of impurity.

Just as in the physical realm there are ultraviolet rays that are imperceptible to the eye, so too in the spiritual realms there are dimensions of our personalities where evil might lurk and wreak havoc on us that we cannot see. No matter how much we can grow by constantly challenging ourselves to go higher, the growth we experience is incremental with diminishing returns. There

are certain imperfections that we simply cannot see and that preclude us from removing them and that therefore are impediments to real growth.

In the Messianic Age, however, we will experience unparalleled levels of G-dly light that light will help us expose the most insidious and subtle forms of negativity that held us back in the past.

Once we are aware of the existence of these previously hidden forms of impurity, the new light will also serve a second function: It will enable us to get rid of these subtle imperfections that we still have, thereby enabling us to serve G-d in a new way. This new energy will empower us to bring atonement to ourselves and the entire world around us.

We, like Aaron, will thus be purged of all that tainted us in the past and will be worthy to serve in the Temple. Indeed, there is even a basis in Torah sources for the suggestion that we will all be qualified to enter into the innermost precincts of the Temple—its Holy

of Holies—a privilege accorded exclusively to the High Priest in the past!

ESSAY FOUR

"HE COULD HAVE SAID: CIRCUMCISION IS ON THE EIGHTH DAY!?"

G-d does not need or want us us to defend Him.

G-d does want us to demand of Him to bring an end to pain and suffering.

This is what our requests for Moshiach are all about!

ESSAY FOUR

"HE COULD HAVE SAID: CIRCUMCISION IS ON THE EIGHTH DAY!?"

Tragedy on the Day of Joy

After seven days of preparing for the dedication of the Mishkan—the portable sanctuary in the desert—the great and momentous day finally arrives. Moses hands over the High Priesthood to his brother Aaron who is to officiate on this auspicious occasion.

If not for the tragedy that followed, this might have been the most joyous event in all of Jewish history. Indeed, our Sages tell us that ten major events occurred on this day. In their words: "This day took ten crowns." But, alas, ironically the two elder sons of Aaron—Nadav and Avihu—whom Moses regarded as being greater than he and his brother Aaron—perished as a fire descended from

heaven that entered their bodies and killed them.

There are many reasons given for their untimely death; most notably the one mentioned explicitly in the Torah: they brought an unauthorized offering.

The Talmud and Midrash supplement this Biblical explanation with others transmitted to us orally that include the one that states that they were intoxicated before entering; or that they lacked their priestly garments, and other similar explanations. But all these explanations still make it hard for us to understand why it happened.

In fact, the more explanations that we see offered for an event the more it proves that there is no satisfying answer. If the answer was adequate, why the need for another answer. We find a parallel to this phenomenon of multiple explanations or answers in the narrative of Moses' punishment when he was told to speak to the rock that it should produce water. What did Moses do wrong to cause him to lose his privilege to enter into the Promised Land?

There are, at least, ten explanations that have been offered by classical commentaries. The fact that there is a plethora of explanations points to the enigmatic nature of Moses' punishment.

Here too, the fact that there are so many explanations as to why Nadav and Avihu died points to the fact that we cannot really comprehend its true reason.

The Enigma of Aaron's Silence

What was Aaron's response to this horrific tragedy?

The Torah tells us that, in fact, there was no response coming from the bereaved father: "Aaron was silent."

There is an enigmatic Midrashic comment that makes the following observation about Aaron's silence:

> "What could Aaron have said? Aaron could have said "And on the eighth day you shall circumcise his foreskin."

What connection is there between circumcision and what the Midrash suggests

could have been Aaron's response to the tragedy?

Aaron's Potential Explanation

One possible simple explanation can be proposed that conveys an important message to us in this post-Holocaust era:

Aaron realized how severe was the punishment meted out to his illustrious and extremely spiritual children for what might seem to many as trivial matters. Aaron surely entertained the question that every thinking human being has asked form the beginning of time: Why? Why does G-d allow such suffering and pain? Why?

Now, for the person who professes not to believe in a Creator and Master of the universe, there is no room for any question. Neither is there a problem for the person for whom G-d plays less than a prominent role in his or her life. It is precisely the Aaron's of the world—those who are imbued with profound faith and devotion to G-d—who are constantly raising this question. And the

more one is troubled by these tragic events the more they will look for answers.

Aaron would have then been "tempted" to provide an "answer" that is strikingly similar to that which we sometimes hear from some today in response to the Holocaust and other tragedies. Aaron might have "conveniently" invoked the analogy of circumcision which occurs on the eighth day just as this tragedy occurred on the eighth day of the life of the Mishkan. This "temptation" might have been buttressed by the belief Aaron certainly had in Divine Providence. The fact that his sons perished on the eighth day could have been explained that it was his repeat circumcision—which our Sages characterized as a sacrifice—of his sons. Only this time it was the ultimate sacrifice.

Aaron may thus have reasoned that just as circumcision was intended to make the child complete, somehow the death of his two sons was intended to make the Jews—who were flawed as a result of their involvement in the creation of the Golden Calf to which he was an accessory—complete. Since circumcision is performed on the part of the anatomy that

is responsible for procreation, he might have reasoned that the death of his progeny served as a collective circumcision rite that also happened to have occurred on the eighth day of the life of the Mishkan.

If this sophisticated theological "explanation" would have been so tempting to Aaron, why **was** he silent? Why didn't he offer this rationalization for the loss of Nadav and Avihu?

Does G-d Need a Lawyer?

The answer is that this attempt at an explanation would not have been an answer at all; it would have actually posed more unanswerable questions than it would have answered.

Surely G-d does not need human sacrifices. Why then did G-d have to take the lives of such holy people? How can we extrapolate from circumcision, where a marginal part of the body is removed with minimal pain and discomfort, and apply it to the untimely loss of human life? Why did G-d bereave the Jewish nation's holiest—second only to

Moses, and in many ways equally holy—person? Weren't there more benign ways of collectively "circumcising" the Jewish people?

Aaron's greatness was that he did not fall for the trap that so many people fall for who think that they must be G-d's defenders and will come up with specious explanations for all of the suffering G-d allows.

The truth is that G-d does not need us to defend Him!

What does G-d want from us?

There is however another legitimate question that we should pose. If we are not to serve as His defender and if we are not to look for ways of rationalizing all of the suffering for which He is ultimately responsible, what does G-d want from us?

G-d does want—in the face of tragedy—to humbly accept that there are things we cannot fathom. If G-d is infinite and transcends all of existence including the realm of logic, then it would be ludicrous for

us to think that we can comprehend everything that G-d does.

But this is not where this discussion ends. One can raise a simple question concerning Aaron's silence.

Are we to suggest that we are to follow Aaron's example and simply be silent in the face of all the suffering we've witnessed? While most would agree that we shouldn't seek and certainly not accept some specious explanation that no moral and thinking person can find satisfactory, many would find the idea of just being silent equally unacceptable.

"A Time to Speak and a Time to be Silent"

In truth, the lesson we learn from Aaron is that when one considers their own suffering, silence can be a virtue. When dealing with the suffering of others, however, G-d does want of us to question, protest and "demand" of Him to reverse the suffering.

Our response to the Holocaust and, for that matter, all earlier and later tragedies should

be to cry out: "*ad masai*-How much longer?" How much longer will we live in a world of injustice and pain? How much longer do we have to wait for Moshiach to come to usher in a time when all of our collective good will bear fruit in an overt, palpable and permanent way?

By making these demands of G-d—even as we humbly recognize how limited we are—we affirm our implicit and profound faith that only G-d—along with our actions that He has mandated thereby empowering us—can right the wrongs of the past.

By making these demands of G-d we declare that He is responsible for all that occurs in this world—even the choices that we make, for He created us and our ability to choose freely—and therefore, He is ultimately the only one who can reverse all of the negative forces.

Needless to stress, as we have just indicated, the above is by no means a suggestion that we leave it all to G-d to make these changes and we can go to sleep, literally or figuratively.

Certainly, as our classical Jewish sources teach us, the actions mandated by G-d for **us** to do to alleviate the pain and suffering, coupled with all of what we do to bring G-dly light into the world through the observance of all the Divinely given Mitzvot, will finally facilitate the one final change we've been praying for the last 2,000 years: the final Redemption.

ESSAY FIVE

THE PARADOX OF JUDAISM

Judaism is about fusion and synthesis.

The goal is the fusion of Divine inspiration with human endeavor.

ESSAY FIVE

THE PARADOX OF JUDAISM

A Day of Intense Joy and Sadness

The happiest day for the Jewish nation was arguably the day discussed at the beginning of this week's parsha: "And it came to pass on the eighth day..." This refers to the eighth day of initiating the service in the Mishkan, the portable Temple the Jews built in the desert. This day has been identified as the first day of the month of Nissan, almost a year after they left Egypt.

Why was this day considered to be so joyous an occasion?

It was the day that G-d demonstrated that He had totally forgiven the Jewish people for their worship of the Golden Calf. On this day a fired descended from heaven and consumed the offerings they brought to the altar in the Temple. This was a clear indication that G-d

was pleased with their gesture and responded in kind.

Yet, on this very day a colossal tragedy occurred. Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, in their zeal to get closer to G-d brought an unauthorized offering. A fire then descended from heaven and killed these two very spiritual people.

At this point Aaron could have protested, or at the very least expressed his grief in ways that would have marred the celebration. Instead, the Torah relates: "Aaron was silent."

Our Sages marveled at Aaron's stoicism. G-d even rewarded Aaron, by giving him a special commandment — not to enter the Temple in an intoxicated state — that was communicated directly to him.

Circumcision and Aaron's Silence

In one cryptic remark, on Aaron's silence, the Midrash asks rhetorically, "What should Aaron have said?" The Midrash answers that Aaron could have said: "On the eighth day he must circumcise..."

Commentators have expressed bewilderment at this comment. What on earth would have prompted Aaron to speak about circumcision when he heard the tragic news of his sons' death? (See preceding essay for an alternative explanation of this cryptic remark.)

One answer explores the reason for Nadav and Avihu's unauthorized offering and why it was so out of place.

The Paradox of Judaism

Judaism is a religion — if it can be called that — of myriads of paradoxes. One paradox that represents perhaps the very core of Judaism is the issue of G-d versus man. Does G-d do everything for us, or do we do things for G-d? In Judaism both are true.

On the one hand, Judaism can be described as a way of life which involves our responding to G-d's demands of us and then receiving His blessings and rewards. G-d is the Creator, Master, Commander and Father. We are His creations who obediently accede

to His commands and derive all that we have from Him. We can either be good receptors and reflectors of His light and energy or instead resist and deflect G-d's light from us.

On the other hand, Judaism is also about our initiatives and efforts. We are unique creatures who rise to the level of partners with G-d in creation. Indeed, according to many Biblical, Talmudic and Midrashic citations, G-d cherishes every gesture we make and hands the world over to us to fix and elevate. Our efforts have the capacity to affect not only the outcome of events in this world, but, moreover, as the literature of Kabbalah teaches us, our actions can impact the spiritual realms as well.

This second approach is summed up in the Chassidic interpretation—ascribed to both R. Dovber, the "Maggid of Mezritch and R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad movement—of the words in Ethics of the Fathers: "Know what is above you." The Chassidic reinterpretation renders this saying as "know that what is above depends on you."

These two directions of G-dly light shining down at us or shining up at Him were expressed in the daily service in the Temple. When the Jews brought sacrifices to the Temple, a fire would descend from Heaven and consume them. The sentiment expressed here is that our sacrifice is merely a response to G-d's initiatives and is thus followed by G-d's fire descending from heaven.

But, in addition to the fire that descended from on High, there is a Biblical commandment to bring our own fire to the altar. Underlying this command is the thought that as much as G-d does for us, He wants our initiative as well. G-d could provide us with the greatest amount of fiery passion, but our small contribution of fire that we generate on our own has much value as well.

This then is what the two sons of Aaron had in mind when they brought the unauthorized offering. According to the Talmud they felt that after the fire descended from Heaven to mark G-d's role in the process, it was important that they do their part in bringing their own little fire.

Prerequisite to the Fire from Below

Indeed, this would have been a legitimate gesture on their part if it had been done at any other occasion besides the day in which the Temple was inaugurated. Although we were empowered by G-d to bring our own little fire to the Temple; that can only be done after the initial period where we open ourselves to be receptive to and bask in the G-dly light.

What permits us to assert our own spiritual power is the realization that all power derives from G-d. Only after fully absorbing the G-dly light that was generated at the inauguration of the Mishkan could they have entertained the notion that their small gesture had cosmic value, or, for that matter, any value at all.

And here is the paradox of Judaism: Only the person who appreciates that there is nothing but G-d may safely assert his or her own role in this world.

This can explain what the Midrash had in mind when it said that Aaron could have referred to circumcision in response to the

tragic death of his two sons. Circumcision, the Talmud tells us, is our way of perfecting G-d creation. In other words, G-d deliberately created a man with a physical anatomical imperfection that reflects a parallel spiritual defect that He told us to remove In short, circumcision is where G-d has given us the power to contribute to the perfection of humanity and the world that G-d created.

Aaron could have used this as a defense of his son's unauthorized offering. What they did, Aaron could have reasoned, was no worse than circumcision. Isn't that what G-d wants of us? Doesn't He encourage perfecting and thereby contributing to His creation? If so, Aaron could have vented some feeling of bitterness at G-d by referring to circumcision.

The Paradox of Moshiach

The same paradox that underlies Judaism in general is also at the heart of the Messianic process. On the one hand, Moshiach is sent by G-d to change the world. And as many of our prayers attest, salvation comes directly from G-d. Moshiach, is G-d;s messenger, who

like Moses whose soul resides in him, reaches the level of transparency so that G-d's energy is channeled through him.

Yet, at the same time, we are told that every Mitzvah we do chips away at the exile and brings us closer to Moshiach and Redemption. Every one of us, the Ba'al Shem Tov taught, possesses a spark of Moshiach. We must search for that spark and ignite it.

But we must simultaneously realize that our Mitzvot are successful because they were ordained by G-d. Had they been man-made ordinances, they could never accomplish anything on their own. And the ability we have to ignite that spark comes from Moshiach.

ESSAY SIX

SUPPRESSING AND EXPRESSING

One of G-d's gifts to us is that we can express deep emotion without artificial methods.

ESSAY SIX

SUPPRESSING AND EXPRESSING

Aaron's Reward for Silence: No Drinking?

When Aaron lost his two eldest sons, at the dedication of the Mishkan, the portable Temple in the desert, Aaron did not respond. Indeed, the Torah, in this week's Parsha, highlights the fact that "Aaron was silent." Our Sages marveled at Aaron's stoicism. G-d even rewarded Aaron, by giving him a special commandment – not to enter the Temple in an intoxicated state – that was communicated directly to him.

In one cryptic remark, on Aaron's silence, the Midrash asks rhetorically, "What should Aaron have said?" The Midrash answers that Aaron could have said: "On the eighth day he must circumcise.."

Commentators have expressed bewilderment at this comment. What on earth would have

prompted Aaron to speak about circumcision when he heard the tragic news of his sons' death? (See two preceding essays for alternative explanations.)

One way of explaining this anomalous Midrash is to better understand the significance of circumcision. According to the Zohar, when a father circumcises his son, it is the equivalent of a person offering a sacrifice to G-d. Aaron, whose two sons perished in the process of their bringing an unauthorized offering at the dedication ceremony of the Sanctuary, could have very easily made the case that he too had offered the ultimate sacrifice, with the death of his sons.

Indeed, Aaron could have waxed eloquently by extending the analogy of circumcision to the death of his sons. Both circumcision and the dedication of the Sanctuary are associated with the eighth day. On the eighth day of the child's life he undergoes circumcision; and on the eighth day since the Sanctuary was erected for the first time, the dedication ceremony took place at which time Aaron's sons were "sacrificed."

Aaron, however, did **not,** deliver the foregoing, or any other eulogy! And for this the Torah sings his praise.

Prohibition?

Why?

Why did Aaron not deliver this or any other eulogy? And why was his reward specifically G-d's communication concerning not drinking before entering the Temple?

To answer the last question first, it must be understood that the prohibition against drinking before or during the Temple service, was more than just a form of prohibition. When an offering was made in the Temple, it had to be done with utmost feeling and spiritual awareness. Very often, our emotions can be bottled up and do not surface when we most need and want them to. To aid in the process of expressing one's innermost spiritual feelings, one might be tempted to imbibe, in the spirit (pun intended) of the Talmudic maxim, "When the wine enters the secrets exit."

By commanding the Kohain (the Priest who performed the service in the Holy Temple) not to drink, the Torah was not only issuing a ban and prohibition against drinking, it was also empowering the Kohain to be spiritual without the wine. This is so because it is axiomatic in Judaism that G-d does not give us a challenge that He knows we cannot meet. If we need to express our emotions when engaged in Divine service, and if He commanded us not to use alcohol to achieve that spiritual high, it suggests that G-d has given us the capacity to achieve that goal on our own.

Thus, by directing the commandment to Aaron, G-d was giving him the inner strength to reveal his spirituality; something that is extremely difficult for most people without the aid of some artificial stimulant.

Reward for Self-Control

We can now also appreciate why this was a reward for Aaron's silence. At times of bereavement it is only natural for a person to vent his pain and anguish. A eulogy

frequently serves as a coping mechanism to help deal with the pain. But, Aaron exercised self-control and did not try to express his emotions of grief, out of respect for the festive dedication ceremony. As a reward for his effort to exercise self-control and **not** vent his emotions when that was not in order, G-d endowed him with the capacity to freely express the desired emotions of spiritual ecstasy without any artificial aids, when that was in order. In effect, Aaron would be in complete control of his emotions; he could, at will, suppress them or express them.

Exile Bottleneck

One of the greatest problems associated with being in exile, is that we are **not** in control of our emotions. The proliferation of therapists attest to the problem our generation has with being in touch with our emotions that manifests itself in two ways: Either we cannot control our emotions or we cannot express them.

This, then, is one of the reasons we refer to the Messianic Age as an age of redemption

and liberation, despite the fact that most Jews today are already living in a free world. While we might be free in a physical, political and even religious sense, our emotions and spiritual feelings are very much in "prison." With the advent of Moshiach, we will finally have the capacity to be in touch with and freely express all of our emotions, even as we will be capable of controlling them, rather than them controlling us.

Riding on the Donkey

One of the Biblical descriptions of Moshiach is that he will come "riding on a donkey."

This imagery has been explained by the Maharal and in Chassidic literature allegorically. The Hebrew word for donkey is *chamor,* which can also be translated as "material." Riding on the donkey therefore implies that Moshiach will be in control of his material and physical nature.

That Moshiach will not be a materialist or prisoner to his emotions is a given. There is no need for us to extol his greatness by suggesting that he is not a prisoner to his

passions and base instincts. Rather, it may understood as an expression of the challenge Moshiach will have in affecting and inspiring the generation in which he comes. Moshiach will endeavor and succeed in helping us gain control over our emotions.

Thus the Talmud reconciles the two contradictory scenarios described Biblically for the coming of Moshiach. In the verse cited above Moshiach comes as a poor man riding on a donkey, yet in another verse he is depicted as a majestic leader coming on a cloud. The Talmud states that if we are meritorious and refined Moshiach will come in a miraculous and majestic fashion; If we are not worthy, however, Moshiach will come in a humble manner.

If we are so mired in exile to the point that it affects our ability to be able to exercise control over our own emotions then Moshiach will have to come in a way that helps us meet the challenge and gain mastery over our "donkey."

If, however, we have done our work and refined our character and gained control over

our emotions, Moshiach will be able to focus on bringing the heavenly clouds and more spiritual energies down to earth.

ESSAY SEVEN

PROHIBITION

Judaism does not oppose drinking alcoholic beverages within certain prescribed parameters.

The ideal form of imbibing, however, is the "wine of Torah."

ESSAY SEVEN

PROHIBITION

Liberal Attitude towards Alcohol?

Judaism does not generally believe in prohibition except for a *kohain* whose turn it is to perform the service in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (as we read in this week's Torah portion). A rabbi may also not render an *Halachic* (Jewish legal) ruling having just imbibed. A *Nazir (*one who makes a vow not to drink wine) is forbidden to drink. There are also designated times during the year when we don't drink wine.

Other than these exceptional situations, Judaism seems to have a rather liberal view when it comes to drinking alcoholic beverages. We usher in every Sabbath and every major Jewish Holiday with wine. The Passover Seder requires that we drink no less than four cups of wine. And, of course, on Purim, we are commanded to drink "until we

no longer know the difference between `Cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.'" Chassidic gatherings are punctuated with *L'chaim's*, when we "toast" one another with blessings of life and all that is good, with a bit of Vodka or wine.

But!

In Judaism there is always a "but," an "on the other hand." Drinking wine and other alcoholic beverages is no exception to this rule. There are ample references to Judaism's abhorrence of intoxication. The first two examples of this "anti-drinking" sentiment can be found in the Torah in the narratives of Noah and Lot.

This anti-drinking sentiment is also quite evident from this week's Torah portion. The two sons of Aaron were struck dead by a fire that descended from Heaven, because they brought an unauthorized offering. Our sages remark that he two sons of Aaron actually died because they entered the *Mishkan* (portable Sanctuary in the desert) in a state of intoxication. The Torah therefore follows this narrative with the commandment

directed to the *kohain* not to drink upon entering the Temple.

Reconciliation

How do we reconcile the two apparently incompatible attitudes towards drinking wine and other alcoholic beverages?

There are at least two distinctions between lawful drinking and the unauthorized version. The first distinction is based on the very first prohibition ever. Talmudic Sages differ as to the identity of the Tree of Knowledge. According to one opinion the forbidden tree was a grape vine and the fruit Adam and Eve were enjoined not to eat was actually a grape. Furthermore, our Sages state, this prohibition was not intended to be in effect forever. Had they waited another three hours — from the time they were commanded not to eat the fruit, until the onset of the Shabbat — they would have been permitted to drink the wine produced from those grapes. Adam and Eve would have ushered in the first Shabbat of creation with the wine created from the Tree of Knowledge!

The problem with Adam and Eve's unauthorized use of the grape is that they were not ready for it.

From this week's Torah portion we derive yet another insight into the propriety or impropriety of drinking. Nadav and Avihu's physical intoxication was a physical expression of their souls' intoxicated state. They used the wine to enable them to "escape" the physical constraints of their bodies; indeed, even to the point where their souls would leave their bodies. This desire to shun the world, even if it is motivated by a desire to get closer to G-d, is improper, because it goes against G-d's will to make this world into a dwelling place for Him.

We thus have two important rules that govern Judaism's attitude towards drinking wine. The first is that there is a time and a place for drinking. Secondly, drinking should never be used as a way of escaping reality and our G-d given responsibilities. It should be used to enhance the joy of Shabbat and Jewish Holidays. Saying *L'chaim* over a cup of wine is a desirable thing when it assists in instilling more life into our Judaism.

The Wine of Torah

The Torah has been compared to various beverages. It is like water that we cannot exist without. It possesses the nurturing quality of milk. Torah has also been compared to wine which generates feelings of joy.

More specifically, it is the esoteric part of Torah—the teachings of Kabbalah—that is likened to wine because it is the "secret" dimension of Torah, just as wine causes secrets to be revealed.

The two criteria for the license to drink physically—one must apply discretion as to the time and place; and may not be used as a form of escape—has been applied to the license to imbibe these secret teachings of Torah.

Kabbalah has always been associated with people reaching the highest spiritual stages even as it has been implicated in many a destructive movement.

For centuries and millennia the study of Kabbalah was reserved for the spiritual elite

who knew when, to whom and how much of it should be revealed.

As we get closer to the Messianic Era, these teachings have been allowed to be disseminated more widely, with fewer restrictions. This is especially true with the advent of the Chassidic movement these mystical teachings have been cloaked in the garb that makes it accessible to all. And while the teachings of Kabbalah can be misinterpreted by misguided people in ways that can cause harm, Chassidic philosophy avoids all the pitfalls inherent in pure Kabbalah.

The reason these teachings—also referred to as the "wine of Torah" have been revealed in recent times is due to the fact that we are so close to the final Redemption that we are given a taste of what will be revealed by Moshiach in the future. Now is the time to encourage more "drinking" of the delightful wine of Torah. L'chaim!

ESSAY EIGHT

THE ANGEL'S ANGEL

Humans are both inferior and superior to angels.

While angels were created before man; we were formed in G-d's though before the angels.

While angels contribute to the spiritual state of the world; we are the purpose for which the world exists in the first place.

ESSAY EIGHT

THE ANGEL'S ANGEL

Seniority or Superiority?

Nadav and Avihu, the two elder sons of Aaron, brought an unauthorized offering to the Sanctuary in the desert on the day of its dedication. Tragically, this unauthorized offering cost them their lives. This week's Torah portion records how G-d sent a fire that consumed them as a punishment for their "unorthodox" actions.

There is a cryptic Midrash that records the following dialogue:

> "When two beams of fire entered the nostrils of Nadav and Avihu, the ministering angels said to G-d, 'Why did You split the sea for Israel.'
>
> "The holy Seraphim declared, 'Return us O G-d to you and we shall return.'

> Some said, 'Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.'"

This Midrashic statement like so many of this genre was deliberately written in a coded form to challenge us to find its hidden meaning.

The following is an attempt to decipher this cryptic Midrash based on the words of Rabbi Abraham Palagi (a nineteenth century Turkish rabbi) with added commentary:

According to this interpretation Moses and Nadav and Avihu had divergent views about their role in the hierarchy of the Jewish people. The debate between Moses on one side and Nadav and Avihu on the other side revolved around the question of seniority versus superior resources. Nadav and Avihu, Moses' nephews, believed that they had superior spiritual potentials and were therefore permitted to bring their own offering without first consulting with Moses and Aaron.

Indeed, Rashi quotes our Sages as saying that Nadav and Avihu actually felt that they were destined to succeed their father and uncle as

the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people. Surprisingly, they actually exclaimed: "When will these elders die and we will take over."

In truth, Moses did not dispute their claim that they were his superior. Moses—in his attempt to console his brother Aaron for the loss of his two sons—said as much to Aaron that "they were greater than us."

Chassidic thought—based on the classic work *Or HaChaim*—explains how Nadav and Avihu had an uncontrollable passion to get closer to G-d regardless of the outcome. Their actions were not the product of an unbridled ego, G-d forbid, but by passionate and fiery souls that could not find comfort in this worldly existence.

Clearly then, Nadav and Avihu, were in some respects superior to Moses and Aaron. Yet Moses and Aaron enjoyed the chronological advantage.

When G-d sent the fire that consumed them, G-d decided in favor of Moses and Aaron—seniority prevailed!

An Ancient Debate

The same debate has its antecedents in the "debate" between the sea and the Jewish people at the time of the exodus from Egypt. When the sea was "asked" to part it demurred. It argued that the sea was created on the third day of the week, whereas humans were created on the sixth day of the week.

The argument of the sea was that the fact that its creation preceded that of the human being is an indication that it is on a higher rung of importance. Thus, the sea argued, why should it suspend its mission of flowing for a mission that involves saving of the Jewish people. In its mind, flowing was its mandate not splitting. Had the sea been created after the human beings, it would have indicated that it must serve humanity. The sea clearly argued in favor of seniority.

One could add to this argument that the since the nature of the sea to flow and not part was endowed by G-d; the only way that can be overridden would be to accommodate the needs of a creation whose existence

preceded that of the sea. If G-d wanted to save the Jewish people, He could certainly have done it without interfering with the mission of the sea.

Joseph and his Brothers

This debate can also be traced back to the division between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph, from all indications, was endowed with a superior intellect. From the perspective of Kabbalah and Chassidut, Joseph embodied a far more superior spiritual constitution than his brothers. Joseph was so spiritual and G-dly that he was able to run a morally depraved country as was Egypt in those days and not be spiritually diminished or compromised.

Yet, despite Joseph's superiority, his brothers maintained that they enjoyed an advantage over him based on their seniority.

Moses and the Angels

This divergence of views was also at the heart of the debate between the angels and Moses

when he went up on Mount Sinai to bring the Torah down to the Jewish people.

The angels took exception to Moses taking the Torah from its celestial realm and bringing it down to the Israelites. According to the Talmud, the angels argued that the Torah is far better suited for the angels who are superior to mortals.

Again, this debate revolves around the question as to whether the advantage of seniority trumps other assets and benefits. According to our tradition, the angels were created on the second day of creation, whereas humans were created on the sixth day. Thus, they argued, the Torah rightfully belongs to them and not to the "junior" and therefore inferior mortals.

One argument that supports the contention of the angels was the recitation of the phrase "Blessed is the name of Your glorious Kingdom forever and ever." This phrase is traditionally recited after the Biblical verse known as the Shema, in which we proclaim "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one." Where did the sentence "Blessed is

the name of Your glorious Kingdom forever and ever" originate? According to our tradition, Moses heard this said by the angels as they praised G-d. When Moses descended from the mount he taught this exquisite, heavenly praise to the Jewish people, but admonished them to recite it quietly so as to not arouse the ire of the angels that we have "appropriated" their work.

Now, the angels, mindful of our reciting it softly, were convinced that the reason we say it this way was to underscore our belief that the angels are indeed superior to us.

In summation, we have four areas where the question as to which takes precedence seniority or superiority:

Nadav and Avihu versus Moses: the sea versus the Israelites, Joseph versus his brothers, Moses versus the angels.

Putting the Pieces of the Puzzle Together

With the above introduction Rabbi Abraham Palagi skillfully sheds light on the cryptic words of the Midrash and puts all of the

disparate pieces of the Midrash puzzle together:

To re-quote the Midrash:

> "When two beams of fire entered the nostrils of Nadav and Avihu, the ministering angels said to G-d, 'Why did You split the sea for Israel?'

Their question does not now sound as if came out of left-field. When the angels saw that Nadav and Avihu, despite their superior spiritual nature, were consumed by the fire that entered their nostrils, this proved to them that Moses and Aaron's seniority trumped the other superior qualities of Nadav and Avihu. If so, they argued to G-d, "why did You split the sea for Israel?" Why would the mission of mere mortals override the mission of the sea that was created before and enjoyed seniority over humans? To be consistent with the way He accommodated the younger, but superior, Jewish nation, G-d should have accepted the argument of Nadav and Avihu that they were superior to Moses despite his seniority.

The Midrash continues by citing the words of the angels known as the "holy Seraphim." They declared:

> "Return us O G-d to you and we shall return."

With this verse they alluded to the return of the Torah to the angels, since it has been established that seniority overrides the other qualities with which humans were endowed.

Perhaps also, the title Seraphim given to these angles is appropriate here. The term Seraphim implies fiery passion, a trait that characterized Nadav and Avihu. These angels could easily identify with their passion and therefore argued the case of Nadav and Avihu.

And the Midrash cites the final argument of the angels:

> "Some said, 'Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.'"

With these words they intended to further buttress their case for the Torah to be returned to the angels. After all, these were the words that originated with the angels!

Moreover, even when these words were "appropriated" by Moses and the Jewish people they still retained their angelic aura. Proof of that was the fact that we recite this prayer in an undertone as if to suggest that it is too holy for us to completely identify with.

With these words the angels were subtly implying that the fact that this lofty prayer that originated with the angels is recited by humans in an undertone suggests that even mortals recognize their inferiority vis-a-vis the angels.

Last in Action First in Thought

Two obvious questions remain on the premise of the foregoing homiletic interpretation:

First, how could it be said that the angels are inferior to us humans? Aren't they total spiritual beings? Are they not always in G-d's presence?

Second, according to this above analysis of the Midrash, the angels' arguments seem to go unrequited. If indeed, seniority overrides

other qualities, as was evidenced by Nadav and Avihu's demise at the hands of G-d, why then did G-d not accept the argument of the angels to give the Torah to them? And why did G-d not accede to the demand of the sea that its mission—that predated the mission of mortals—not be vacated to serve the interests of the Israelites?

The answer to both questions is that, in truth, we enjoy **both** advantages over the angels. In addition to our spiritual superiority over angels, we do, in fact, precede them chronologically. Moreover, the reason we are superior to angels is because we do, in fact, enjoy a chronological advantage over the angels.

To explain:

While it is true that the angels were created before humans—angels on day two, humans on day six—that was only true in the domain of action. In terms of the Creator's **thoughts** it was the reverse; we were conceived of before the angels.

This can be understood by way of an analogy. When a person builds a home it is the

finished product that is the first thing to arise in the builder's thoughts. A person first imagines a beautiful house and then sets into motion a process that brings his plan to fruition. While the foundation might be the first thing to be constructed it was not the first thing to be conceived.

Similarly, though all other creatures—including the angels came first in the actual creation process—it is the souls of the Jewish people who "arose first in G-d's thoughts." G-d's ultimate dream that He conceived of first was that there would be a perfect world. And how would He achieve this "dream"? It would be achieved by the Jewish people observing the Torah and its Mitzvot and serving as a light to all the nations. This end result—which we refer to as the Messianic Age—arose **first** in G-d's thoughts.

Thus a world—even of angels—without the existence of Jewish nation would be untenable. There would be no need for the angels—or for that matter, for anything—to exist without there being a Master Plan, the main ingredients of are the Jewish nation and Torah.

Thus, anything that relates to the mission of the Jewish people of bringing G-d's plan to fruition is superior to any other part of the creation process. Nothing can claim to be more important than doing what it takes to overcome all the obstacles and bring the Jewish people and the entire world to their destination.

We can now understand why the sea did eventually accede to the command to split. When the Jews were at the sea they were on the road to Sinai to receive the Torah, the Master Plan for the universe, which—together with our souls—was conceived before anything else. The sea's mission had to bend before the mission of the Jewish people precisely because, in reality, they enjoyed seniority as well as superiority.

However, when did the sea split? Only when, according to the Talmud, Nachshon ben Aminadav took the plunge into the sea, demonstrating that he was well aware of his mission to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. No sooner did he express his desire to get to Sinai, come what may, the sea had no alternative; it had to split. That gesture on his

part exposed the true source and nature of the Jewish people—that they were conceived first in G-d's mind—which preceded and overrode everything else.

So indeed, we are superior to the angels because only we can fulfill G-d's purpose for the creation of everything else including the angels. And because we were first in G-d's thoughts, we are endowed with unparalleled G-dly energy that enables us to realize our G-d given goal—to make this world a dwelling for Him. This will be realized imminently with the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY NINE

LET IT BE KNOWN TO ALL!

Although one's focus on publicity and fanfare is a sign of superficiality, it can enhance an already existing deep relationship.

ESSAY NINE

LET IT BE KNOWN TO ALL!

Atonement

This week's parsha – Shemini – discusses the events that occurred on the first day of the Month of Nissan, at which time Aaron was installed as the High Priest.

One of the offerings he was commanded to bring was a calf. Why a calf? Rashi explains that this was "to let it be known that G-d forgave him for his role in the construction of the Golden Calf by way of this calf offering."

A question was raised as to why Rashi could not have simply stated that the offering of the calf was to serve as atonement for Aaron for his role in the construction of the Golden Calf. Why the need for Rashi to preface that statement with the words: "to let it be known?"

The simple answer is that whenever a person is appointed to leadership, he must not only be devoid of sin, but also avoid the appearance of sin and impropriety. When the two tribes of Gad and Reuben asked to get their inheritance on the east bank of the Jordan, Moses rebuked them harshly for insinuating that they would stay behind while their brethren would fight to conquer the land. These two tribes then clarified their position that they intended to join their brethren in the conquest and only then would they return to the east bank.

When Moses heard their revised proposal he agreed to it and exhorted them to keep their commitment. Moses concludes with the words: "You will be clean to G-d and Israel." Our Sages derive from this that one should not only be clean in one's relationship with G-d. One must also make sure that there is no appearance of impropriety; that others should not think that something was done wrong.

Applying this principle to Aaron it may be suggested that if Aaron had not brought the calf as an offering, it might have been

presumed that he was still guilty for his role in the Golden Calf debacle. Hence, by commanding Aaron to bring the calf as an offering, G-d let it be known to all that he was forgiven for that sin. He was now "clean to G-d and Israel."

Sign of Affection

A contemporary Chassidic Master (the previous Rebbe of Skulen) offers a different answer to the question as to why Rashi prefaces the words: "to let it be known."

In the Talmudic treatise Ethics of the Fathers the great Sage Rabbi Akiva teaches:

> "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of G-d. It is a sign of even greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image G-d, as it is stated: 'For in the image of G-d He made man.'
>
> Beloved are the people of Israel, for they are called children of G-d. It is a sign of even greater love that it was made known to them that they were

> called children of G-d as it is stated: 'You are children of G-d your G-d.'
>
> Beloved are the people Israel, for they were given a desirable instrument, as it is stated: 'For I have given you good merchandise; do not forsake My Torah.'"

From these words we can see that there are two levels of love. One could love someone or something. But when they articulate their love for that person or thing it is a sign that the love is of a higher magnitude. Telling someone how special they are—assuming that it is sincere and not just flattery—expresses an even higher level of appreciation of that individual.

We can now understand why Rashi did not simply state that the calf offering was an atonement for Aaron. It should be assumed that Aaron had atoned for his involvement with the Golden Calf in the months preceding the events discussed in this week's parsha. The events of this week's parsha take place on the first of Nissan, one year after the Exodus. The Golden Calf saga occurred on

the seventeenth of Tammuz, almost nine months earlier during which time G-d had already given Moses a second set of tablets indicating His desire to forgive the Jewish people for their involvement in the Golden Calf incident.

The question thus arises, why did Aaron have to bring a calf offering? A follow up question: If Aaron's repentance until now did not suffice due to the sheer magnitude of the sin and the higher expectations G-d had of him how does the offering of a mere calf remove the stain of the Golden Calf from him?

Rashi, therefore explains that the purpose of offering the calf was not for his atonement. Rather, G-d wanted everybody to know that he had been forgiven. After all, even if someone asks forgiveness for hurting another and is granted forgiveness, the relationship will rarely be as loving as it was prior to the incident that caused the rift. It takes much more than simply saying "I'm sorry" to restore the trust and love.

Aaron's case, however, was different. By having Aaron bring an offering from a calf it

was G-d's way of showing him that His love for him was not diminished. It was as strong, if not stronger, than it was initially. Letting everyone know that he was forgiven served to enhance Aaron's stature in the Jewish community, inasmuch as it expressed G-d's great love and affection for him. Now everybody knew how special Aaron was.

Galus: Hidden Love

In applying the above to Jewish history it can be said that when the Holy Temple stood and we witnessed overt miracles on a daily basis, it was G-d's way of telling the world that He loves the Jewish people.

Indeed, the Talmud states that the miracle of "*ner ha'ma'aravi-the* western lamp" of the Menorah that would never extinguish on its own was a testimony to the world that the Divine presence rested in Israel.

Similarly, the Jews who came to Jerusalem for the three pilgrimage Festivals would be shown how the Show Bread that was placed on the Table in the Temple would stay warm for a week. This, the Talmud states, was to

demonstrate G-d's affection for the Jewish people.

In Galus/exile, however, G-d's love is concealed. As a general rule, we do not see G-d's miracles and that suggests that He is not ready to show His love for us to the entire world.

One of the things that will change with the future Redemption through Moshiach will be the way G-d will let it be known how much He loves us.

The application of this narrative to our times is that although as a people we certainly have our shortcomings. We have done things in the past that have distanced us from G-d. And even though the Merciful G-d has certainly forgiven us, there are those nations of the world that will constantly taunt us that we have lost our status as the "Chosen Nation." This is one of the facts of life in Galus.

However, when we survey the events of **recent** years and decades we see a plethora of miracles wrought by G-d for the sake of the Jewish people. These miracles—that are, by

definition, **public** displays of His love for us—is G-d's way of telling the **entire** world that we are special to Him.

But, until such time, when Moshiach will be sent by G-d to redeem us and restore us to our original position, the hostile nations will continue to impugn our integrity. Thus, our plea for Moshiach is a plea for G-d to **show** us and the entire world in ways that leave no room for doubt that we enjoy a special relationship with Him and that His love for us has not been and will never be diminished.

ESSAY TEN

WE'RE STILL WAITING

When doing good does not beget positive results; don't give up.

Just do more good. The results are guaranteed!

ESSAY TEN

WE'RE STILL WAITING

Why Couldn't Moses Do it?

Parshas *Shemini*—which means "the eighth"—is read in many years shortly after the **eighth** day of Passover. Owing to the fact that nothing in the world happens by coincidence there must be significance to this phenomenon. With respect to Torah matters it is far more clear that the confluence of two events is by design that behooves us to search for its deeper meaning.

More importantly, insofar as Torah is concerned, there must also be a message conveyed to us by this confluence of events. Inasmuch as the word Torah means instruction we must be able to glean some useful information that will inform our lives.

This week's Parsha discusses what happened on the eighth day after the Mishkan, the

portable Sanctuary, was built. In last week's Parsha the Torah details how Moses initiated the service in the Sanctuary for seven consecutive days. This week's Parsha begins with the statement "And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel." Moses then proceeds to instruct them as to the various offerings they were to bring on that day. After performing the service, G-d demonstrated His acceptance of their efforts by sending a fire that "consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering..."

Rashi relates that throughout the initial seven day period when Moses officiated, the Jewish people were eagerly anticipating G-d's dwelling in their midst. On the eighth day, Moses said to them, "my brother Aaron is more worthy than me and through his efforts G-d will dwell in our midst."

Commentators ask why indeed Moses' efforts for the first seven days did not succeed in eliciting a positive Divine response? Wasn't Moses superior to Aaron? What was it about Aaron that changed the dynamics of the situation?

Cause and Effect Mindset

One approach to this issue is that this initiation process was one that was intended to convey a message for all future generations about the way spiritual goals are attained.

Living in a world of nature, we have developed a "cause and effect" mindset. With the flick of a switch we can access virtually everything; almost instantaneously. Our mechanized and computerized world has intruded into the way we think about spirituality. If the right person does the right thing at the right time, then we have a guaranteed effect at the time and place that we want it.

To be sure, Kabbalisitc thought teaches us that indeed every positive act begets an immediate positive spiritual effect. However, these effects are rarely discernable to us in the physical and material world. Our egos, as well as the distractions brought about by our interests and desires in non-spiritual matters; make it difficult for us to feel the spiritual effects of our actions.

In addition, the spiritual process was designed by G-d to be elusive. It is G-d's way of hiding Himself so that we look for Him. This process has been compared to the father who will play a game of hide-and-seek with his child. The object of the game is to get the child to search not to elude discovery.

Be Disappointed but Don't Give Up

Thus, when the Jewish people saw how the most qualified person—Moses—performed the service in the most perfect manner for a complete cycle of seven days, they expected to see immediate results. Hadn't they done everything perfectly? Why did G-d not respond? When they did not realize this cause and effect system, they were upset.

But rather than giving up in despair they continued to yearn for the elusive Divine response. And it was precisely this sense of yearning and anticipation that generated the events of the eighth day—G-d's response with a fire from heaven.

The obvious lesson from this is that when a Jew performs a Mitzvah, he expects to see

immediate spiritual results. When these results do not materialize as we expect, it should be interpreted as G-d's way of challenging us to see whether we will give up and stop seeking Him, or will it enhance our desire to get closer.

The Messianic Paradox

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) relates that Moshiach is one of those things that come when we are distracted from his coming. Commentators explain that this does not mean that we should distract ourselves from Moshiach in order for him to come. That interpretation flies in the face of so many statements to the contrary; that we must constantly pray for, wait for, eagerly anticipate and yearn for Moshiach. How can one be distracted while he or she doesn't stop talking about it?

We must therefore draw the conclusion that Moshiach's coming eludes our expectations, and despite our dashed hopes and expectations of his coming, we continue to wait and yearn for the age of peace that will

be ushered in by Moshiach. In other words, no matter how much we wait for his coming we will still be surprised because we have been disappointed so many times.

[On a higher and deeper level, Chassidic thought explains, that no matter how much we anticipate his coming, Moshiach will introduce us to dimensions of Redemption that go beyond our understanding.]

Indeed, Moshiach's coming is hastened when we look back and realize that we have "pushed all the buttons" that generate spiritual energy to the world that should have brought Moshiach and the Redemption. When we see that it still has not happened it induces a state of yearning and eager anticipation, for Moshiach—not despair and disillusionment. This yearning, in turn, is what generates the events of the "eighth"—the coming of Moshiach who is identified by the Talmud as "one of **eight** princes." Moshiach is so identified because the number eight represents that which transcends the natural order of seven.

Connection Explained

This explains the connection to the eighth day of Passover. On this day, the selection from the prophets is Isaiah chapter 11—arguably the most explicit description of Moshiach and his efforts—is read as the Haftarah, the prophetic reading that follows the Torah reading.

The Ba'al Shem Tov also instituted a special meal at the end of this day, designating it as Moshiach's feast. The eighth day of Passover is thus directly linked to the central theme of this week's Parsha, not just because it shares the number eight, but because the Parsha instructs us how to realize the coming of Moshiach who is associated with the number eight: Do not stop searching for him, do not despair. No matter how long it has taken and no matter how many times we were denied our request for Moshiach, we do not stop asking for him.

In the words of the famous *Ani-Ma'amin*, many Jews sung in the death camps, "even though he tarries, I await his coming every day." This statement has acquired even

greater poignancy in light of the tragic events of the past few months. May the renewed yearning and eager anticipation for Moshiach bring an end to all of the pain and usher in the final age of Liberation!

ESSAY ELEVEN

INQUIRE

Judaism has always advocated a spirit of inquiry.

It is religious obligation to question, not doubt, the words of the Torah and uncover hidden meanings.

The spirit of inquiry and investigative prowess also applies to searching for and discovering Moshiach; the internal as well as the external Moshiach.

ESSAY ELEVEN

INQUIRE

The Middle Word

In the narrative concerning the offerings that were brought on the day the Mishkan was dedicated, the Torah relates how Moses "inquired" about procedures that were followed by his brother Aaron.

The Hebrew word for inquired *darash,* is special because it is the middle word of the entire Torah.

Two questions arise. First, what is the significance of the middle word of the Torah? Second, why is the word "inquired" the word that marks the middle of the Torah?

The significance of any text is captured by its opening, its conclusion and also its middle. The beginning of a text is known in Hebrew as its head. The head is the most important

Part of the body; it contains within it the energy of the entire body and it directs and coordinates the body as well. Hence the importance attached to the beginning of a text. Indeed, King David exclaims in Psalms: "The head of Your words are true."

The end of a text sums up the entire text that preceded it. Our Sages expresses this idea with the words: "Everything follows its conclusion." The Hebrew word for conclusion" in this statement is "*chitum*" which also means "seal." The end of a text places the imprimatur on this text; it is the text's "bottom line."

The same can also said about the middle word of a text. It signifies its central point, or its core. Indeed, the very word for truth in Hebrew—*emet,* according to the Jerusalem Talmud comprises the first, last and middle letter of the alphabet. This indicates that all three parts of a text constitute truth; the most authentic and therefore important part of the text.

This is especially true about the Torah, which is designated as *Toras Emes*, the Torah of

truth, which is inherently consistent. No other text purports to be nor is absolute truth. And therefore the lesson that we can derive from the first, middle or last letter of Torah is that more pronounced.

Genesis

The first word of the Torah is *Bereishis* (In the beginning). This refers to the creation of the world as it arose in G-d's thought in its most abstract and pristine state. This has been compared to an idea that one may have about a project. The very first glimmer of the idea as it arises in one's conscious thought would be referred to as the genesis of the project. Genesis is thus about the world as it existed in its potential state before it assumed form and character.

The word *Bereishis* also conveys why the world was created: "for the sake of Torah and Israel, who are called *resihis*—primary beings."

The Final Word

The last word of the Torah—and as we mentioned, the last word is also referred to as its seal—is "Israel."

A seal has two functions, it designates the end of something and also protects it from being compromised, preserving its integrity and purpose. The seal of the Torah is Israel. The Jewish people were chosen to take the raw material of the world and perfect it and preserve its spiritual and G-dly status.

The word Israel means mastery over the physical and spiritual forces within creation. Israel also comprises two words that mean "the straightforward path to G-d." While genesis is primarily and overtly about *how* the world came to be, Israel is about *what* the world should *become*; a world in which the natural and even the spiritual forces are harnessed to the engine of G-dly transformation. Nature obscures the straightforward path to G-d, placing all sorts of roadblocks in our path. Israel is about the way we no longer have to take a circuitous

route to G-d. Israel is about seeing the path and following it without any detours.

The Bridge

We can now begin to grasp the significance of the middle word of the Torah. The middle represents the bridge between the world of potentiality and the world of actuality. The middle word represents the methodology that enables us to take the world (*Bereishis*-Genesis) and transform it into an Israel-spiritual utopia existence.

The methodology is "*darsah*" inquiry. When Moses—the personification of Torah—is used to probe beneath the surface of one's personality, one discovers one's true nature and assets. One then realizes that he or she is not just a part of creation (Genesis) but is also a part of the Creator, through which one is able to transform the world.

When we employ the "Moses" within us to probe beneath the surface of life, an entirely different picture emerges than what meets the eye. The world, rather than being an obstacle, we discover that it is like clay in the

hands of a potter that craves our involvement to mold it to conform to G-d's will.

In short, the key to going from the genesis to completion is the process of inquiry. By probing beneath the surface of the triad—Torah, Israel and the world around us—employing the "Moses" component of our souls, we will realize our goal.

It is sadly so often where people carve out a comfortable niche in their spiritual lives, reluctant to probe deeper into their soul and their Judaism. They lack the healthy intellectual and spiritual sense of curiosity. They are content with what they have.

The Midrashic Genre

The term *darash*-inquired is related to the genre of Rabbinic literature known as Midrash. Unfortunately, this body of Divine wisdom has been maligned by many who fail to see its true value. Not only is Midrash not the fancy of some fertile rabbinic mind but it is said to contain the greatest mysteries of Torah.

But, even one who cannot fathom the secrets of Torah when studying Midrash should realize that Midrash is the instrument through which our Sages probed beneath the surface of Torah. The Midrashic mindset does not allow one to see things superficially. It is what links the abstract and amorphous world of Genesis to the completed world of Israel. Indeed, as we read in this week's parsha, Moses was the first person to use the method of *drush* to seek the true meaning of the Torah.

Seeking the Temple and Moshiach

The obligation to be a *doresh*, an inquirer, was applied by our Sages to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem as well. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 30a) asks:

> "What is the basis for the requirement to do things in remembrance of the Temple?"

The answer is a citation from the Book of Jeremiah where the prophet exclaims:

> "...she is Zion [a reference to the Holy Temple], *ein* ***doresh*** *lah*-there is none that **inquires** after her."'
>
> "From this, we can gather that she ought to be inquired after."

Tragically, the Temple being "out of sight" has become "out of mind" for many Jews who have forgotten about the significance of the Holy Temple as a model of what the world was intended to become.

The insertion of the word *darsah*-inquired in the very middle of the Torah tells us that the "central" obligation of Judaism is to inquire and probe for all that is holy in our midst.

Living as we are in Galus/exile we have become complacent and have made peace with our existence. This is precisely the time we are to start searching for Moshiach consistent with the words recited every month when we recite the blessing over the new moon: "And they sought their G-d and their King David," a reference to the need to not wait for Moshiach to "go out" to meet us but for us to go out and look for Moshiach.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE KABBALAH OF FOOD

Eating kosher is an act of liberation.

We liberate the hidden sparks of holiness embedded in the food.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE KABBALAH OF FOOD

The Plethora of Kashrus Prohibitions

Kashrus, the Jewish Dietary laws, represents a multifaceted area of Jewish law and a pervasive part of our very lives as Jews. These laws can be divided into many categories.

This week's Parsha, Shemini, features the laws concerning which species of animals, beasts, fowl and fish are kosher (fit for consumption) and which are not. In an earlier Torah portion (Mishpatim and Ki Tisa) we were informed about the prohibition concerning the forbidden mixture of milk and meat.

Elsewhere, the Torah exhorts us to slaughter the animal as we have been commanded, referring to the laws of *shechitah* (ritual slaughter). We've also learned in other Torah portions concerning the prohibition of eating

an animal that is *neveilah* (not slaughtered properly) and *tereifah* (an animal that has a punctured organ etc. that would prove fatal) even if it was slaughtered properly.

In addition, the Torah imposes a prohibition against eating the blood, as well as certain types of fat, of an animal. The prohibition against eating the animal's sciatic nerve and not eating an animal before it was killed, round out the many prohibitions that involve the consumption of meat.

In addition to the prohibitions that apply to meat, there are also restrictions that apply to vegetation as well. For example: there is a Biblical prohibition not to eat the fruit of a newly planted tree for three years. One may also not eat the mixture of the vine and grain and some other mixtures of plants. And one may also not eat the bugs that may be in a vegetable.

The question that begs to be asked is, why does the Torah impose so many restrictions on the food that we eat?

Soul Food and the Soul of Food

The answer to this question lies in the dynamics of eating, from the Jewish perspective.

There are things we do in life because we have no other choice and there are things we do because that is what life is all about.

In the former category, when we do what we have to do in order to survive, we do it in the most perfunctory manner, not expending too much time and resources on these activities. After all, these activities are not what we think life is all about. And while they ensure our existence; they do not capture the essence of why we exist.

In the latter category, however, we spend as much time as we can and savor every moment of it. Those pursuits that we think are of little consequence for survival are actually the stuff out of which a true life is made.

Eating clearly falls into the second category. Despite the necessity in food consumption,

eating has become an activity in which many invest much of their time and energy. Unlike breathing, eating is an activity around which we plan so much of our other activities.

Food has always been a part of all of our celebrations. The Shabbat and Holidays are required to have food—and good food—as part of their observance. We have work lunches where much of what we decide in our businesses is decided. For many eating is not just a necessary act in order to survive but an end unto itself. In our day and age, huge multi-billion dollar industries have been established that cater to the palate and the gourmet consumer.

Why did G-d make it so that food consumption would be pleasurable to the point that it has become a ritual.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, addressed this question by referring to a principle in Kabbalah that it is the food that wants to be eaten by us more than the desire that we have to eat the food. Every morsel of food contains Divine energy

that is even more potent than the divine energy that we possess naturally.

Kabbalah teaches us that there is a higher spiritual dimension that is the source of the physical aspects of our world. That source is the world of Tohu, which means chaos. It is a spiritual realm where the energy is so potent that the vessels G-d created to contain and channel that energy could not contain it and were shattered, scattering the sparks of this potent energy into the physical realm. More specifically, these sparks, containing this powerful Divine energy, is embedded in the food we eat.

When we eat, we not only derive physical energy from the food, but moreover, we derive intense spiritual energy for the soul. Because through eating kosher food we are capable of freeing that spark from its imprisonment and allow that food to unleash heretofore unparalleled energy to the person who eats it and to the world at large.

Talking Food!

Every time we eat, the G-dly spark "calls out" to us and asks of us: "Please eat me, so that I can be liberated from the confines of the food." Similarly, our soul beckons to us to eat the food so that it can be nourished by receiving a dose of spiritual energy it does not possess on its own.

But there is a catch to all of this. The spiritual energy that is contained within the food can only be extracted when the food is kosher and eaten properly.

When the food is not kosher, the spark cannot be extracted by eating it. This food is forbidden. In Hebrew the word for forbidden – *assur* – can also be rendered "imprisoned," the Divine spark is not capable of being released from its imprisonment, notwithstanding any and all efforts of the consumer to do just that.

Indeed, the only way we can liberate the hidden sparks in forbidden food is by resisting the temptation to eat it. The energy one expends in resisting is in some ways even

greater than the energy we invest in doing something right.

When a food is permissible, the Divine spark contained within the food can be accessed and released into the world, thereby making the world a holier and more spiritually attuned place. Thus the word for permissible in Hebrew—*muttar*—also means "released" or "unfettered."

However, as stated before, the spiritual energy that is contained within the food can only be extracted when the food is kosher and eaten properly. Eating properly means that we acknowledge the Divine source of the food. And the way we acknowledge that Divine source is by reciting the appropriate blessing before consuming the food and the appropriate blessings after the meal. This helps to re-direct our understanding of food as a spiritual experience and not simply for the body's indulgence in physical pleasure and not even for the sake of survival.

Eating Kosher as a Preparation for the Messianic Era

Thus the process of eating is more than a culinary experience. It is the ultimate way through which our actions release the most potent forces of Divine energy into the world. And in the process of releasing this powerful energy we thereby pave the way for the Messianic Redemption, at which time the whole world will be permeated with Divine energy.

What distinguishes the Messianic Age from life in the present exile era is that in the future we will have released all of the potent energies of the world of Chaos, with one caveat. Not only will that explosion of divine energy not overwhelm us or paralyze us; it will be fully internalized within our well-structured and disciplined vessels. The same vessels that were previously capable of receiving only limited doses of spiritual power, will be expanded. They will now be capable of absorbing and internalizing all of the light.

In truth, there is an even higher spiritual

dynamic to eating which commences when the process of refining the sparks is completed.

This process involves generating powerful Divine energy by bringing together dynamic spiritual forces.

The Rebbe has informed us that we have already fulfilled our service of refining the world needed for the Redemption. Now, the Rebbe, taught is the time for us to welcome Moshiach and internalize the Messianic energies.

Thus, when we eat kosher food, preceded by a blessing, with the intention of generating Messianic energies, we actually hasten the process of Redemption.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE BIG FISH

We were created as land creatures, but our goal is to be submerged in the refreshing waters of Divine knowledge.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE BIG FISH

The Discrepancy

The Jewish dietary laws are discussed extensively in this week's *parsha*, where the Torah elaborates on the characteristics that determine which animals, fowl and fish are kosher and which are not

When one surveys these dietary laws one can detect a distinction between the way the Torah treats animals, fowl and fish. With regard to animals, the Torah lists those animals that are kosher because they chew their cud and have split hooves. All the others—the overwhelming majority of animals, even the ones that have one of the two signs—are not kosher.

Concerning fowl, by comparison, the Torah lists only the non-kosher species. All those that are not mentioned are, by definition,

kosher. Jewish law, however, does not permit us to eat any bird unless there is a clear tradition as to its permissibility because we are not certain about the identity of the non-kosher birds recorded in the Torah. So while theoretically most birds are kosher, we are precluded from eating most of them.

With respect to fish, the Torah gives two characteristics that determine which fish are kosher: they must have fins and scales. Since the overwhelming majority of fish do possess these "signs," most fish are therefore deemed kosher.

Why, one might ask, are most animals not kosher, most fowl theoretically kosher but for all practical purposes unfit for our consumption, while the majority of species of fish are identifiably kosher and fit to eat?

To be sure, the primary reason for our observance of these dietary laws is to follow G-d's will, which transcends our finite mind's capacity to find reasons for everything. We therefore should not be troubled by our inability to know the reason for all of the commandments.

What's the Lesson?

So to rephrase our question: What lesson can we learn from the discrepancies that exist between, animals, fowl and fish? The word Torah is instruction. Thus every detail of Torah can provide us with lessons that are relevant to us in our own day and age.

The following is an explanation based on Chabad Chassidic teachings, particularly the writings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Human Animal

Animals are land creatures. This symbolizes the aspect of our personality that is connected to the earthy and materialistic pursuits in life. Unfortunately, most materialistic and animalistic drives can be detrimental to our spiritual well-being. One must be extremely careful to guard one's interaction with the corporeal and earthy influences. And when one does so they can harness that animal nature to the pursuit of noble goals. Left unchecked, the animal in us can be destructive.

Cry Fowl

Fowl symbolize the person's spiritual drive represented by the quest for more knowledge. It manifests itself in philosophical and scientific inquiry, driven by humanity's desire to go higher and higher in our understanding of the cosmos. Intellectual pursuits are not as inherently risky as the animalistic ones, thus most fowl are in theory kosher, nevertheless, for all practical purposes, many of us are not aware of the pitfalls in some of the isms and philosophies that appeal to our spirit of inquiry and discovery. Frequently, one's intellectual pursuits can steer a person off the path that G-d had chosen for us.

To avoid these pitfalls, we must therefore follow tradition, in terms of knowing what direction we should follow in our quest for greater knowledge.

Submerged in G-dly Waters

Fish symbolize the individual whose egos have been submerged in the G-dly waters of knowledge. Indeed, the description of the

ultimate Messianic Era of divine enlightenment by the prophet Isaiah is: "the entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea is covered with water."

In this G-d saturated environment one can partake of virtually all that is offered provided that one has fins and scales.

This means that the license for the consumption of this G-dly knowledge hinges on it having the capacity to propel one to a higher place. G-dly knowledge must lead to continuous growth ("fins").

But even G-dly knowledge can be dangerous if it goes beyond one's capacity. A powerful surge of spiritual energy can overwhelm one and cause spiritual injury. One could easily misinterpret or misconstrue these lofty ideas. There is therefore a need for a protective force that prevents us from being harmed in one's spiritual journey in life ("scales").

Based on this analysis of fish as symbols of spiritual saturation, we can appreciate why, for example, a traditional Shabbos meal consists of fish. Fish symbolize the most pure and secure form of spiritual growth.

"Big Fish Swallowing the Little Fish"

One could raise the following question. One of the common denominators in kosher animals and fowl is that they are not carnivorous. Fish, kosher or non-kosher, on the other hand, are always swallowing up other fish, yet they are still kosher. Why this difference?

Perhaps one can view the idea of the big fish swallowing the little fish in a positive vein. As was discussed in other essays, there are two general levels in Judaism: that of a *katan*, minor and that of a *gadol*, mature adult. And while the Torah respects the *katan* and caters to his or her needs, the Torah wants us to mature to the level of a *gadol*.

Moreover, the Torah wants the higher and more mature approach to Judaism to "swallow" up the childish and immature level, to the point where it no longer becomes necessary to address the immature part of our souls. We are not talking about the purity and innocence of the child—that we should always retain. We are discussing the need to ultimately abandon our childish

perceptions of G-d and the Torah and our approach to life in general.

This "big fish swallowing up the small fish" phenomenon is what will characterize the Messianic Age, which can be called the "Age of Maturity." In that time, we will all graduate from the immature state we are in now that we are in galut/exile into a sophisticated state of knowledge.

This is alluded to in the very word for Redemption which is *Geulah.* The Rebbe cited frequently the teaching of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the author of the Tanya and the founder of the Chabad movement) that the word Geulah shares the same letters as the world for exile—*Golah.* The difference between these two words is the insertion of the letter aleph into the word Golah. In other words, what makes the difference between exile and Redemption is the concept represented by the letter and symbol of the aleph.

The Rebbe explained that the letter aleph has three levels of meaning. The first is Master. When we introduce the awareness of the

Master of the world into exile it becomes Geulah. After we reach that level where we "swallow" the aleph of G-dly awareness we move on to the next level of aleph, which stands for knowledge. From awareness we graduate into a more sophisticated knowledge of G-d, which is then followed by the concept of *peleh*, wondrous and elusiveness (the letters of the word aleph in reverse).

If we have to translate all of the above into "fish jargon" it means that in the Messianic Age the big fish of appreciating the wondrous aspects of the Divine will swallow up the advanced levels of knowledge, which, in turn, will swallow up the junior level of awareness, which, in turn, will swallow up our infantile perceptions of G-d and reality.

And this is also why one of the symbols of that age is the "serving" by G-d of the Leviathan, the huge fish that symbolizes the pursuit and discovery of the deepest secrets of Judaism that will swallow up all of the lower levels of knowledge.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

DRINK TO RECTIFY THE DRINKING

Keeping Kosher and Anti-Semitism have united Jews for opposite reasons.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

DRINK TO RECTIFY THE DRINKING

Shemini and Purim: To Drink or Not to Drink

The joyous Festival of Purim occurs, this year, in the week that we read the parsha of Shemini. *Shaloh* stresses the connection between a weekly parsha and the holiday with which it intersects, even when, on the surface, it seems that they have nothing in common. What connections can we find between Shemini and Purim?

One obvious connection is the reference to a Kohain not drinking wine before entering into the Holy Temple to perform the service there. Aaron's sons, we are told by our Sages, perished on the day the Mishkan (the portable Sanctuary in the desert) was dedicated precisely because they did not

anticipate that command and entered these holy precincts in an intoxicated state.

Purim, too, is all about drinking. It begins—as recounted in the Megillah, the Book of Esther—with the detailed description of the Persian monarch's orgiastic party that lasted for 180 days! And this was then followed by another really wild party that lasted for another seven days at which time the King Achashveirosh, lost his head, figuratively speaking, and his queen, Vashti, lost her head, quite literally.

For the Jews these parties were also tragic. Our Sages reveal to us that Jewish participation at this party was the reason G-d threatened them with annihilation. According to the Talmud this threat was due to "enjoying the party of that evil man" (King Achashveirosh). According to some interpretations that party was thrown by the King to celebrate what he thought was the total dashing of the Jewish people's hopes—based on Biblical prophecies—that the Holy Temple would be rebuilt.

The Talmud explains that Achashveirosh miscalculated the end of the seventy years that was prophesied as the length of time it would take for the Temple to be rebuilt. When the seventy years passed—according to his miscalculation—and the Temple was still not rebuilt, Achashveirosh was convinced that these prophecies would not materialize, and thus he celebrated.

That celebration was essentially a celebration of the defeat of the Jewish nation and the loss of their most cherished institution — the Bais Hamikdash. For Jews to join in this celebration was so egregiously insensitive and sacrilegious that G-d sought to jolt them out, figuratively speaking, of their drunken stupor, reflected in, and exemplified by, their physical state of intoxication which occurred at that infamous party.

On Purim, in accordance with Talmudic fiat, we therefore have the obligation to drink more than usual. By engaging in drinking and still remaining faithful to our Jewish identities and hopes for the rebuilding of the Temple we correct the negative consequences of the

drinking that precipitated the threat of Haman in those days.

Until You No Longer Know the Difference Between Cursed is Haman and Blessed is Mordechai

The Talmud makes an incredible statement with respect to the obligation to drink on Purim: "One is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until one no longer knows the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai!" There are literally hundreds of interpretations of this cryptic statement, all of which insist that it cannot be taken literally.

Based on the foregoing analysis we might suggest a new interpretation:

The Book of Esther relates that the feast hosted by the King was in accordance to the will of "*ish v'ish*," which means to comply with each man's will. The Talmud states that the expression *ish v'ish,* which when translated literally means "man and man," refers to two of the people who were placed in charge of this feast: Mordechai and

Haman. Now we all know that Haman's intentions and involvement in supervising this feast were not favorable to the spirit of the Jewish people. He certainly did not intend for them to come out of the feast inspired to go out and build the Holy Temple, and for that we certainly should not hesitate to repudiate Haman in the harshest of terms: "Cursed is Haman".

However, we must try to understand Mordechai's role at that feast. He certainly could not have wanted the Jewish people to participate in this blasphemous orgy of a banquet. But Mordechai was still in galut/exile. Even after the miracle of Purim, Mordechai was bound by Persian authority and so still could not build the Holy Temple as long as—in the words of the Talmud—"We are still subjects of Achashveirosh." So Mordechai had to limit his influence to that of one who was put in charge of the party in order to minimize the damage to the Jewish spirit (no pun intended). And for that he should certainly be blessed.

However, both Mordechai (unwillingly) and Haman (more than happy to oblige) were

involved in this party that had at its goal the continued subjugation of the Jews to a Persian monarch in a world without complete Redemption as exemplified by the lack of progress in the building of the Beit Hamikdash.

So on Purim, we must rectify the negative aspect of the drinking party that celebrated Galus. And to that end it does not suffice to rejoice through drinking in a way that reviles Haman because he wanted to denigrate the Jews and, on the other hand, to extol the virtue of Mordechai because he tried to salvage some of their spirituality. That would not be a complete reversal of the harm done to the Jewish people at that party.

In order to rectify that party we must also recognize that even Mordechai's role at that time (though, of course, due to no fault of his own) fell short of the mark. Because even after the miracle of Purim, let alone at the time of the feast that he supervised, there was no Bais Hamikdash; the Jewish people still remained in Galus.

Hence on Purim we no longer are satisfied with cursing and repudiating Haman and blessing Mordechai for salvaging and preserving some portion of our Jewish sprit and dignity. We want much more than that; we want Purim to get rid of the Galus entirely—with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the building of the Third and final Bais Hamikdash, that is, a complete and total Redemption.

Amalek and Kosher Food

Another connection between this week's parsha of Shemini and Purim is the subject of Kashrus, the Jewish dietary laws, specifically which animals we may consume and which are forbidden to us.

According to one Midrashic opinion, the banquet that Achashveirosh threw for the citizens—including the Jews— of Shushan was not entirely kosher. And it was that transgression of partaking of non-kosher food and wine that precipitated the heavenly decree that would threaten these Jews with annihilation.

What is the conceptual basis for the connection between Kashrus and the events surrounding Purim?

One way of explaining the connection pertains to the integrity of the Jewish people as a people that does not shed its identity. While Judaism includes many signs that identify us as Jews such as the Mezuzah on our doorposts, the Tefillin we wear on our heads and arms, the Shabbos and Jewish holidays, etc. there is always the threat that we may still assimilate into foreign cultures that will adulterate or even negate our Judaism.

What Mitzvah has the capacity to prevent us from such acculturation? It is Kashrus which counters that threat because it compels us to dine together with those who share the same dietary restrictions and whose way of life is similar. The greatest bulwark against assimilation is the observance of these laws of Kashrus. Likewise on a spiritual level, the eating of kosher food generates the requisite spiritual energies that line our souls and bodies with the resistance to the infiltration

of attitudes and beliefs that are anathema to Judaism.

Historically, when Jews lose their commitment to Kashrus and begin the process of assimilation into non-Jewish society, many ultimately choose to return to the Jewish fold as a result of their encounter with anti-Semitism. When they discover the degree to which they were rejected by those very people they sought to join, and when they realize how these people even seek their destruction as we've seen in Germany during the era of the Holocaust, the Jews then return to their own people and their own religious life.

Thus, there are two diametrically opposite ways that the Jewish people have historically countered the forces of assimilation:

The first is through their observance of the Torah in general and Kashrus in particular. The second is through the diabolically evil forces of the very nations into whose culture they wished to enter.

We can now understand a most cryptic statement of our Talmudic Sages:

> "The most righteous of the animal slaughterers is the partner of Amalek!"

Amalek is identified in the Torah as representing the most wicked of nations and the arch enemy of the Jewish people. How can anyone think there is even the remotest connection between any notion of a Jewish profession, let alone one who provides us with both kosher food and Amalek?

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Aryeh Halevi Grossman, of blessed memory, provides an ingenious explanation of such a connection in his work Darkei Yaakov:

Both Amalek and the providers of kosher food have become strange bedfellows because they share one thing in common, albeit for opposite reasons. Both serve the interests of Jewish unity and fidelity to their traditions. Kahsrus, as we have explained, is the strongest fortification against the intrusion of alien ideas into the Jewish community and to the Jew remaining within the Jewish fold. And, paradoxically, Amalek, too, in his own diabolical way shocks us into realizing the necessity of our remaining Jewish. The threat

from the Hamans of the world serves to jolt us out of our reverie and delusion that we are welcome in other societies and that we can graze in foreign pastures. Thus, ironically, the providers of kosher food ("The most righteous of animal slaughterers") and Amalek are indeed partners!

"Until You No Longer Know the Difference Between Cursed is Haman and Blessed is Mordechai"—Revisited

We can now find a second novel interpretation of the enigmatic passage in the Talmud that people should drink on Purim until they no longer know the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai.

However, in light of the above we might suggest the following explanation:

Haman, the descendant of Amalek, is the most reviled figure in all of Biblical literature. And Mordechai, the hero of Purim, is obviously one of its most beloved figures. Yet when Purim comes we can realize that Haman was actually, in a most bizarre way,

Mordechai's partner in bringing the Jewish people to their senses. Mordechai did it by inspiring them to be faithful to the Torah, particularly the laws of Kashrus. And Haman accomplished the same—and perhaps even more—when he unleashed his diabolical plan to annihilate them.

So on Purim we no longer are to know the difference between these two opposite personalities. Both became partners in the Divine drama that brought the Jews back to their roots.

There is also a flip side to this lack of distinction between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai. For so much of our existence and especially in the last century—and continuing today through the likes of the contemporary Persian Haman and others—we have had our fill of Amalek and his attempts at destroying us. We have had ample opportunity to return to our own people and Torah as a result of these Haman-like threats. Historically, many will argue, Anti-Semitism ("Cursed is Haman") did as much—if not more—to unite the Jewish people as did the positive inspiration we

derived from the "blessed Mordechais" of the world.

However, now we are situated on the very threshold of Redemption. And, as foretold by our Prophets and Sages, we are therefore on the verge of eliminating the Hamans as well. It therefore behooves us to reverse the equation in favor of accentuating "Blessed is Mordechai." Previously, we would get our jolt of inspiration from the Hamans and would equate it with the inspiration we used to get from Mordechai. Now we are to shift gears and give preference to the inspiration we get from the Mordechais and equate that with the shock value of the Hamans.

In simple terms this means that no longer should we have to resort to negative stimuli to restore our Jewish consciousness. Instead let us unite as Jews through the positive influences and under the banner of the Rebbe, the Mordechai of our generation, and his campaign to strengthen our observance of Kashrus, one of the main themes of this week's parsha.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

FIX AND DECORATE

Hypocrisy and inconsistency are not synonyms.

The former is an intention to deceive; the latter is the natural fluctuations of life.

We win some battles and lose some.

ESSAY FIFTEEN
FIX AND DECORATE

Instruct the Jewish People

After the tragic death of Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu, who were struck down by G-d for bringing an unauthorized offering, G-d instructs Aaron to admonish the surviving priests to abstain from wine when they are called upon to do the service in the Sanctuary. G-d concludes this admonition by stating:

> "So that you will be able to distinguish 'between the holy and the profane... and to instruct [*l'horos*] the children of Israel regarding all the statutes which G-d has told them, through Moses."

Commentators cite a parallel verse in an earlier parsha concerning the skill of Betzalel

in constructing the Mishkan, where the same word *l'horos*-to instruct appears: "He placed in his heart the ability to instruct [*l'horos*]."

Commentators see the complementary nature of these two verses. The verse in our parsha speaks of instructing the children of Israel, whereas the identical term as used in the earlier parsha implies that G-d endowed Betzalel with the ability to instruct his own heart.

One can derive several lessons from these two verses:

Intoxication: Bad for the Heart

First, the verse in this week's parsha appears in the context of not drinking wine before entering the Sanctuary. By extension, Rashi states, the Torah admonishes a rabbi not to render legal decisions after drinking wine. When a rabbi, teacher or anyone who attempts to impart knowledge to another does so, their minds must not be affected by the consumption of alcohol or any other influence that can distort the message.

When we consider this verse together with the one that speaks of instructing one's own heart, it suggests that when we seek to have the Torah's message of creating a Sanctuary in our own lives, we must do so without having a clouded mind. Any form of intoxication—be it from wine or even from material pursuits, honor and power—will distort our perception of truth and will prevent the message from entering our heart.

Fix Yourself First?

Another lesson, cited by some, which we can derive from this equation is that in order for us to be successful in instructing and inspiring others, we must first instruct our own heart.

This theme echoes the Talmudic statement (Sanhedrin 19a): "Fix yourself and then fix others." This saying is applied to a king who can judge others, therefore he too is subject to being judged.

The Rebbe, in a letter to a university professor, urged him to inspire others. The Rebbe continued by discussing the foregoing

Talmudic quote that one must first fix oneself before fixing others, by referring to Talmud's choice of language. The Aramaic word *k'shot* which we translated as "fix" actually has the connotation of "decorate." The Rebbe thus concludes from this that when it comes to decorating or adding an ornament to the other's spiritual life one must first enhance one's own spiritual life. However, when the subject of the lesson is the basics of Jewish life, such as learning Torah and performing the Mitzvos, one cannot wait to achieve proficiency in these areas before helping others. One must help the other concurrently with helping oneself.

It is interesting to note that the Aramaic word *k'shot* can also be translated as "truth." We can now render the Talmudic statement thus: "When it comes to decorating or demanding truth of others, first demand it of yourself!"

Both translations are related. When one performs a Mitzvah with truth, i.e., sincerity and integrity, it beautifies, decorates and adorns the Mitzvah. Although a Mitzvah is valid even if done perfunctorily or for ulterior

motives, nevertheless, the Mitzvah done without feeling and truth lacks heart and soul. One must not wait for one's own observance to meet basic standards, and certainly not wait for one's further attainment of truth and purity, before teaching the performance of Mitzvos to others. However, if one demands the other to perform the Mitzvos with beauty, excellence and the attainment of higher goals and objectives, he or she should first demand the same of himself or herself.

This, then, is the meaning of the two references to *l'horos*: Before one tries to instruct and inspire the children of Israel, in a manner that will give them an enhanced version of a Mitzvah, *k'shot,* the instructions must enter and penetrate one's own heart. The message must be conveyed with sincerity and love.

When it comes to the basic level of observance, however, we cannot wait until our own observance is perfect. Simultaneously with working on ourselves we also have an obligation to "reach out" to

others and instruct them about the basic observance of Torah and Mitzvos.

The False Challenge of Hypocrisy

One may challenge the above premise (that we should instruct others concerning the basics even if we have not yet gained full appreciation of the message) by raising the objection that it would be hypocritical to tell someone to do something before doing it oneself.

The answer to this argument is twofold:

First, hypocrisy is defined as someone who puts on a show of piety and righteousness, but is insincere and uses that veneer as a way of deceiving others, perhaps even with the intention of causing them harm. If a person is sincere about doing the right thing by teaching others, but cannot yet muster sufficient will-power to do it himself or herself, that is not hypocrisy. At the worst, it is simply an inconsistency. At best, it suggests that the person who instructs is taking baby steps in his or her journey towards self-perfection.

Second, if there is a hint of hypocrisy here it occurs in the reverse. Instructing and influencing others to do that which is right is the real thing. It is consistent with truth and righteousness. It is a Mitzvah to help others do the right thing. The only suggestion of hypocrisy is that we ourselves have not yet reached that level of commitment that we are asking of others. The onus of not being hypocritical should not weigh down our efforts to instruct others, but rather on our own lack of initiative in applying the message to ourselves.

It is useful to consider a simple analogy here: A thief decides to refrain from stealing one day each week but continues to ply his trade the other days. If this makes the thief a hypocrite it is not because he desists from stealing one day a week, but because he continues to steal the other days of the week.

If those who cry "hypocrisy" are obsessed with being honest and true to themselves, which is admirable, this should inspire them to live by the instructions they give others rather than prevent the transmission of necessary knowledge to others. Withholding

information and inspiration from others, according to the Talmud, is tantamount to withholding food in a time of shortage.

May the Real Me Stand Up!

When our behavior with regard to helping others grow belies our own level of commitment, we must ask ourselves, which is the real me? Does my desire to positively influence others define the true me, or does my lack of personal commitment reveal my true inner identity?

A story is told of a Chosid-follower of the Rebbe Maharash (the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe) who dressed in modern attire for his business dealings, but when he came to Lubavitch to be with the Rebbe he wore traditional Chassidic garb. One year, he decided to come dressed in his modern business attire. When the Rebbe questioned him about the change in his manner of dress, he replied that he did not want to be a hypocrite and try to "fool" the Rebbe about his level of Chassidic practice. To which the Rebbe responded: "I thought the real you was

the way you appeared when you came to Lubavitch and not the way you act when you are involved with your business..."

In truth, Chassidic thought, based on Talmudic sources, teaches us that "deep down" every Jew wants to do that which is right. The real person inhabits the identity that emanates from our G-dly souls. When we fail to go in the direction charted for us by the Torah **that** is where we are inconsistent. Inspiring others is in total conformity with our true identity and desire. We should play "catch up" with ourselves.

Words from the Heart Enter the Heart

Having stated all of the above, there is another side to the coin. If we want our efforts at helping others to be successful we must instruct with our heart in it. We must decorate ourselves with enhanced feeling and love so that our message will not only provide others with the bare minimum but will also give them the ability to be decorated with love and truth.

This message is implied in the words "Decorate yourself first and then decorate others." If you want your efforts to be rewarded with optimum results do them with the beauty that comes from sincerity, warmth and love.

In the words of our Sages: "Words that emanate from the heart will enter the heart."

Application to the Message of Publicizing Moshiach

This twin principle (of not delaying the instruction to others even while we attempt to internalize the message) has been applied by the Rebbe (*Sefer HaSichos* 5751 p. 778) to the message that Moshiach's coming is imminent. The Rebbe asked that we publicize this message with words that "emanate from the heart." However, the Rebbe added, this announcement should be made even by those who doubt that they have fully internalized the message. Inasmuch as their faith is intact, they ought to publicize this message to their communities and their families ("why should their families suffer from the [messenger's

own] lack of progress in comprehending the message").

The Rebbe concluded:

> "Certainly, with the appropriate efforts, the message will be accepted and will ultimately yield the desired results. It will also assist the one who makes the announcement and publicizes the message to integrate and internalize the message."

ESSAY SIXTEEN

IDLE IS IDOL

A person was created to be mobile. One must always strive to grow.

To be a liberated person one must first be intolerant of the stifling stagnation of exile.

ESSAY SIXTEEN
IDLE IS IDOL

Connections

No sooner than the Mishkan, the temporary Sanctuary in the desert, is dedicated, the Torah proceeds to discuss the laws of Kashrus: which animals, fish and fowl are permissible for consumption.

Commentators ask why the Torah addresses this particular subject at this point. Is there a connection between the dedication of the Sanctuary and the dietary laws?

Another question relates to the timing for the reading of Shemini. This year, we read it right after the Festival of Passover. This proximity suggests that there is also a connection between the kosher diet and Redemption.

In truth, both connections are there and are themselves related. Our consumption of food

parallels the offering of sacrifices in the Temple. In both scenarios the animal is elevated to a higher spiritual plane. In the case of the Temple sacrifices, a single offering had the power to affect animals on a macro level, including our internal Animal Souls. When we consume kosher food we accomplish the same effect on a micro level. Consuming kosher food is our individual way of elevating the physical world and paves the way for the Redemption that will commence with the building of the Third Bais Hamikdash.

To better understand the power of eating kosher food let us reflect first on the two signs the Torah gives us to identify the species of animals that are kosher, fit for consumption.

The two signs are enigmatic. How is it possible that an animal's split hooves and cud chewing make it worthier for our consumption than an animal that lacks these two signs?

This question leads us to consider the physical properties and functionality of these two signs:

The Idle is an Idol

Before we reflect on the significance of the split-hoof, we must first discuss its prerequisite — the hoof itself.

An animal uses its hooves to get from one place to another. Most hoofed mammals graze for their food. They must often travel long distances in a day to find food and water, and when threatened by predators they prefer to flee rather than fight. It is therefore important that they be able to walk or run for a long time. Hoofed mammals have hooves because this extremely hard surface helps them travel across rough ground.

In short, the hoof enables the animal to get from one place to another without hurting its feet. The hoof facilitates travel.

For an animal to even be a "candidate" for being kosher it must possess hooves because they signify a mandatory human trait: the

desire to get from one place to another. Staying in one place results in stagnation and will prove to be destructive to one's very life.

The Talmud, in its discussion of the mutual obligations husbands and wives have in their marriage, states that a wife should not delegate all of her domestic responsibilities to maids notwithstanding her family's immense wealth. No person, the Talmud says, can be allowed to remain idle. Idleness can lead to all sorts of immorality and vice.

On the surface this appears difficult for us to understand. How can otherwise decent and refined people go astray just because they have time on their hand?

In truth, it is not that idleness leads to immorality; idleness is itself immoral. Idleness contradicts the very *raison d'etre* of our existence. "A person was born to toil," states the Biblical book of Job. We have been created to be in motion every moment of our lives. Seen from this perspective, immobility is no different from moving in the wrong direction. In some ways it is actually worse.

Of course, there must be time for rest. But when rest is dedicated to help us move after resting, it too is considered to be part of our journey.

The Torah says so much in the very end of the book of Exodus where it refers to the journeys of the Jewish people in the desert. Rashi observes that even when they were encamped it was a part of their journeying, because the objective of their resting was to enable them to continue on their journey.

The Fast Horse

To illustrate the point, there is a story of a brilliant young chosid who rebelled against his parents' Chassidic ways and strayed from Judaism. His Rebbe (in one version I heard from my grandfather, of blessed memory, it was the Ba'al Shem Tov; in another version I heard it was the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe) approached him and posed the following question:

"Which is better, a healthy steed or an old, crippled horse?" (I think one may still use the

term "cripple" for a horse, even in our p.c. world.)

The young man was puzzled by the absurdity of the question, but when pressed to give an answer, he replied, "Why, certainly the healthy horse is better."

The Rebbe demurred. "A healthy horse can stray very far from the road, while a crippled horse cannot stray so far."

"Aha" countered the young man, "but a healthy horse can always return to the road, when it realizes it has strayed..."

The Rebbe did not need to elaborate on the message the young man himself had blurted out. He was the healthy steed who, though he may have strayed far, remained capable of returning to the proper path with lightning speed. In fact, that is exactly what he did!

Idleness is wrong but not because it can lead to vice. Idleness is a vice all by itself and that is why it can easily lead one to other vices. In fact, inactivity is a direct assault on one's very existence.

An Animal Soul without hooves cannot be kosher; lack of hooves is a sign that one has no desire to move, which can frequently be more dangerous to the soul than moving in the wrong direction.

Apertures

Once we have ascertained that a person's Animal Soul is aware of its *raison d'etre*, we can check for the rest of the first sign, for it is obvious that mobility in and of itself is not kosher unless it goes in the right direction. The right direction is determined by a higher source; a source of light and true enlightenment. That light comes from multiple, but related, sources. The light is both the G-dly light of Torah and Mitzvos and the light that emanates from our G-dly Souls. For the internal Animal Soul to benefit from the guiding direction of G-dly light, it must be open and receptive. That is the meaning of the split hoof: it is an aperture through which the light can enter and guide the Animal Soul in the correct direction.

However, an animal's split hooves, while an absolute prerequisite for it being kosher and permissible for us to consume, does not suffice. The animal must also chew its cud, which is a metaphor for persistent reflection on our direction in life. If we were primarily conscious of our G-dly Soul, with our Animal Soul being a mere interloper or even a reluctant guest, we would not have to worry too much about the Animal Soul's ability to distort the G-dly Soul's illumination. In reality though, the Animal Soul dominates our consciousness most of the time. The danger is that when the G-dly Soul sends its message to our conscious mind it will become muddled and we will misinterpret the meaning. To eliminate that possibility, we must go through repeated exercises of reflection and introspection before allowing our "Animal" to go in any direction.

Exile is Not Kosher

The Midrash links the non-kosher animals listed in the Torah to our various periods of exile. Exile is mistakenly thought of primarily

as a time when we have been driven out of our land and persecuted by the powers under which we find ourselves. This is only partially true. An even more serious effect of exile is the sense of comfort we can begin to feel as we adjust to our exile conditions. After a while, we cease longing for return to our Land and rebuilding the Bais Hamikdash. Golus-exile becomes tolerable.

Indeed, we have just celebrated Passover, concerning which the Torah relates G-d's declaration to the Jewish people about their deliverance. G-d promises to liberate them and uses four expressions of redemption, corresponding to the Four Cups of wine we are required to drink at the Seder.

The very first statement was:

> "I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt."

The Hebrew word for burden can also be rendered "tolerance." Hence the verse can now read: "I will take you out of the [state in which you developed a] tolerance for Egypt." Even before G-d promises to save the Jews from their slave labor by the exodus from

Egypt itself, G-d promises to take them out of their tolerance and acceptance of exile.

Even before we remove the shackles of exile ("... and I will save you from their labor") which is the first active stage of Redemption, we must first cultivate a desire to get out of exile as expressed in the first part of the verse: "I will take you out of tolerance for Egypt." Those who remain inactive and lack the initiative needed to get out of Golus - because they have learned to tolerate it - lack the very foundation necessary for Redemption.

Once we learn to become intolerant of exile, we can then proceed to throw off the shackles of the Animal Soul and enjoy complete Redemption, as expressed in the subsequent words:

> "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you as a people for Myself and I will be a G-d to you..."

To become the beneficiaries of G-d's "outstretched arm," we must have "split

hoofs" and "chew our cud" to make ample and uncluttered space within our animal ambitions for G-d's "outstretched arm."

It is no mere coincidence that the Torah mentions a kosher diet in the reading after Passover, and in the context of the dedication of the Sanctuary. By introducing light into our Animal Souls, which direct it towards Redemption ("split hooves"), and by never ceasing to regurgitate these thoughts ("chewing of the cud") it guarantees that the Divine energies unleashed during our Redemption from Egypt will be repeated with even more vigor in the Final Redemption.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE FOUR SPECIES: GETTING OUT OF FOUR EXILES

Keeping Kosher strengthens our past, present and future

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE FOUR SPECIES: GETTING OUT OF FOUR EXILES

One Sign, Not Enough

At the end of this week's parsha we learn of the animals, birds and fish that we are permitted to eat and those species that are off limits.

The basic rule the Torah provides for an animal to be considered kosher for it to have the two signs of *ma'alah geirah*, chewing its cud, and *mafrisei parsa*, having split hooves.

Most animals except for the few mentioned in the Torah are not kosher because they lack both of these signs. There are, however, four species that possess one of the two kosher signs, but they are still not kosher.

They are: the *gamal*-camel, the *shafan*-rock badger (according to others: the Llama), the *arneves*-hare (according to others: the two

humped camel) and the *chazir*-pig. The first three chew their cud but do not have split hooves, whereas the pig has split hooves but does not chew its cud.

Present, Past and Future

Commentators point out that there is an anomaly in the way the missing signs of these four animals are described:

With regard to the *gamal* it employs the present tense: "he **does** not part the hoof." With regard to the *shafan* it says: "he **shall** not part the hoof." With respect to the *arneves* it employs the past: "he **did** not part the hoof." With regard to the pig it uses the future tense for the absent sign of chewing its cud: "it shall not chew its cud." (In most English translations these nuances are absent and they are all translated equally in the present tense.)

Why does the Torah change the tense from present to future to past?

Four Species, Four Empires

There is a Midrashic commentary on these four non-kosher species that correlates them to the four empires that exiled the Jewish people subsequent to the building of the first Beis Hamikdash, Holy Temple.

According to the Midrash, the *gamal* alludes to the Babylonians; the *shafan* corresponds to the Medians/Persians; the *arneves* to the Greeks and the *chazir* to the Romans.

To understand the changes in the tenses with respect to these four species we must reflect on the different approaches these four empires took in persecuting the Jewish people:

The Babylonians, who destroyed the first Temple, were out to extinguish the spiritual light of the Temple and of the Jewish soul.

The Persians attempted to destroy the Jewish body. Haman, the Prime Minister of Persia succeeded in convincing its monarch to have all the Jews annihilated in one day. His focus was on the bodies of the Jewish people. Purim, the holiday that celebrates the defeat

of Haman's plan, is thus primarily a Holiday of feasting.

The Greeks directed their assault against the Jewish mind. They wanted to extinguish the light of Torah and Mitzvos. Thus, Chanukah, the holiday that celebrates the defeat of the Greeks is primarily one of spiritual activity, with the focus on lighting the Menorah.

The Romans and their successors subjected the Jewish people to all three versions of persecution. They tried to destroy our souls, bodies as well as our commitment to Torah and Mitzvos.

According to the Midrash, each of the first three nations had some redeeming quality. The Roman Empire and its heirs have none. The fact that they have split hooves—a kosher sign—is actually considered to be a sign of duplicity; feigning piety, while acting treacherously.

The *Gamal*/Babylonian Assault on the Present

With this introduction we can now understand why the *gamal*'s sign (which

corresponds to the Babylonian exile) is described in the present.

One of the ways the forces of evil and exile try to enslave us is to attack the present. When the Torah speaks of Teshuvah (repentance or more precisely, return) it introduces it with the word "Now."

The implication is that in order for us to change we must not postpone it for the future. One must take the initiative now!

Similarly, when we express our desire for an end to the present exile, we must add the word "now" as in the refrain of the well-known melody: "We want Moshiach, **Now**!"

Babylonia is known for its darkness. The Hebrew word for Babylonia, *Bavel* connotes confusion. In a state of darkness and confusion people tend to not know how to act; emotional paralysis sets in. In that state of darkness there is no present.

To get out of the Babylonian mindset and bring light to our souls, we must take action now.

When the hoof is split it allows light to get through. The fact that the *ganal's* hooves are not split, points to the Babylonian exile status that does not allow the spiritual light to shine through. The Babylonia version of this obstruction is that it stands in the way of immediate change.

This explains why, when the Babylonian exile was over and Ezra retuned with tens of thousands of Jews, he could not get the majority of them to return with him. They felt that there was no immediate need to return. The Jews were still under the influence of the Babylonian impurity and thus the second Temple was not to be the ultimate one in which G-d's presence would be permanent.

The *Shafan*/Persian Attack on the Future

The *shafan* which corresponds to the Persian exile, which focused on destroying our bodies, is connected to the future.

Its lack of a split hoof—alluding to its obstructive nature—manifested itself primarily in its objective to prevent the

future of the Jewish people. By emphasizing that all of the Jewish people—men, women and particularly children—shall be annihilated in one day, it would have, G-d forbid, destroyed all hopes for the future.

The *Arneves*/Greek Assault on the Past

The *arneves,* which corresponds to the Greek Empire, is focused on the past. Its lack of a split hoof, which indicates its obstructive nature, is directed against our association with the past. When a Jew is connected to the past, to his or her parents and teachers, we are part of an unbroken chain that links us to Sinai, Moses and G-d who revealed Himself at Sinai.

To keep the Jews ensconced in exile, the forces of evil attempt to sever those ties with the past by making us forget our origin and all the knowledge that we've stored in our collective and individual minds and hearts. The Greeks sought to afflict us with spiritual amnesia.

In the *Al Hanissim* prayer that we recite on Chanukah we thus describe the Greek's

intention of getting us to "forget G-d's Torah." To forget is to sever our ties with the Torah we always knew and the Mitzvos we always observed. The Greeks did not mind if we would study Torah as long as it was detached from its path back to the G-dly revelation at Mount Sinai.

The *Chazir*/Roman Assault on the Past, Present and Future

And finally, the *chazir* which corresponds to the Roman exile that includes all subsequent periods until and including the present is a composite of all the preceding ones. In the past two thousand years since the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash, we have been subjected to every form of oppression imaginable. There were times when they assaulted our souls and other times our bodies. Some tried to convert us to their religion and some tried to extinguish Judaism entirely. Collectively, all of the empires of this final exile have attempted to destroy our past, present and future.

However, the *chazir's* non-kosher sign of not chewing its cud is also phrased in the future because the ultimate weapon of this force of exile is to thwart the ultimate future of the Jewish people by keeping our redemption at bay. As long as we have a belief in and anticipation for the final Redemption, they realize that we are invincible. To be able to harm us, these unclean forces try to undermine our hope for and belief in Moshiach and Redemption.

Keeping Kosher: Strengthens our Past. Present and Future

In truth, all these four species and empires can be found internally.

The threats to our well-being arise when we postpone making changes, deemphasize the need to bring more children into the world and provide them with an authentic Jewish education, forget our past and when we give up our hope for the future.

Every time we eat kosher it is more than just a reminder of our vulnerability to these four empires and their destructive nature. It also

generates the spiritual energy to break out of all four exiles and mindsets. And ultimately they are to be transformed into positive forces in which change occurs now, the future guaranteed, our connection to Sinai solidified, even as we anticipate the full revelation of Moshiach and the true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

DOUBLE DUALITY

Keeping kosher is good for the soul and the body.

But, most importantly, it contributes to our sensitivity to spiritual matters.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

DOUBLE DUALITY

The Two Signs: Identification or Determination?

The two characteristics that identify an animal as kosher are split hooves and cud-chewing. Any animal that does not possess both of these traits, such as the pig or the camel, is not kosher and may not be eaten.

The Rebbe discusses whether these two traits merely identify those species which are kosher or whether they actually determine their kosher status. In other words, does the fact that an animal has split hooves and chews its cud make the animal sufficiently refined that its consumption allows us to elevate it, whereas an animal that lacks either of these two determining factors lacks the potential to be elevated and may therefore not be consumed?

If the latter approach is true, we have to understand what is it about these two physical characteristics that contribute to the kosher status of an animal.

The Rebbe goes a step further. Even if we are to conclude that these signs are merely for purposes of identification, they must also have some symbolic significance, inasmuch as everything that happens - and the intersection of any two events or concepts - is by Divine providence and orchestration. If G-d, in His infinite wisdom, specifically chose to make these animals kosher, we must say that there is a connection between these traits and the animal's kosher status.

Let the Light Shine!

The Rebbe explains that the split hoof is a sign that the animal's connection with the earth is not absolute. That is to say, the split allows the light do shine through its hoof. This tells us that our connection to material existence must not be absolute. We must allow a ray of spiritual light to interrupt our connection to the physical.

The chewing of the cud, the Rebbe explains, is suggestive of the need to rethink those of our actions that involve the animal within us. Before engaging with the material aspects of the world, we must reflect carefully and consider whether that action is warranted and not do things impulsively.

Chida, the great Sephardic sage of the nineteenth century, cites the commentary of Rabbi Ephraim that the split hooves represent the two worlds that we inherit, this world and Olam Haba: the World-to-Come. By the same token, chewing the cud also represents the reward we derive from our Mitzvah observance in this world and the much greater reward we will receive in the World-to-Come.

The question can be asked, why the need for both signs? Do they not both allude to the two worlds to which we are entitled due to our Mitzvah observance? Furthermore, why are these two worlds hinted at in the signs for a kosher animal?

Two Versions of the World-to-Come

One way of distinguishing between the two references to the two worlds is to recognize the difference between the nature of the duality expressed through the split hoof and the duality that is expressed by the chewing of the cud.

To better grasp the above, a brief introduction is in order:

When our Talmudic Sages mentioned the term *Olam Haba* - the World-to-Come - they were referring to two distinct scenarios for the future. The first is the life of the soul in this world as it inhabits and gives life to the body and then, having completed its mission down here, returns to Paradise. The soul is given the opportunity to bask in G-d's light in Paradise. The degree to which the soul can enjoy this spiritually blissful state, and rise to higher levels of consciousness, is commensurate with its achievements in this world. The more, quantitatively and qualitatively, one studies Torah and performs the Mitzvos in the here and now; the more the soul will be rewarded in the Afterlife.

There is however a second understanding of Olam Haba, which relates to the Messianic Age and the Resurrection of the Dead. This scenario involves life in the future, when all existence will be transformed as we inhabit a utopian world. In that time, the world will reach a state of perfection. The Beis Hamikdash, the Holy temple, will be rebuilt and G-d's presence will be felt throughout the world. Our ability to perform the Mitzvos and study Torah will be greatly enhanced.

It may be suggested that the two signs, with their message of duality, parallel the two scenarios of the World-to-Come.

Two Sides of the Same Hoof

The split hoof is really one hoof that is split into two. This alludes to the fact that the two worlds are not two distinct worlds but one is a mirror reflection of the other. This means that whatever we accomplish in this world, we will reap its benefits in the next world. In this context, the meaning of *Olam Haba* is the world of the soul after it separates from the body. In the Afterlife there is no new

dynamic; we are "merely" reaping the spiritual benefits of our accomplishments in this life. Concerning this period the Talmud states: "Happy is the person who comes here with his learning in hand." One receives in the next world only that which one has enabled in this world.

Repetition to Perfection

The second metaphor for the two worlds—chewing of the cud—is about repeating a process in the pursuit of perfection. The animal chews its cud to facilitate proper digestion of the food it consumes. Without the repetition of the process, the animal's diet would be compromised.

This metaphor can be said to allude to the Messianic Age. That era will mark the culmination of this world's mission and realization of the objective to make our world a dwelling place for G-d. The world in the present is, by definition, deficient. Our study of Torah is compromised due to our exile and we suffer from the distractions and obstacles that exile conditions impose. Similarly, our

ability to observe the Mitzvos is seriously curtailed. Of the 613 commandments in the Torah, we can fulfill only about a third. The other two-thirds require conditions that presently do not exist, such as the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and the ingathering of the entire Jewish nation to the Land of Israel.

Hence, the Messianic Age will be the culmination of the process of "digestion" of all our spiritual energies, which are presently seriously deficient.

Kosher Catalyst

A question still remains: How does the reference to two sets of two worlds have anything to do with the laws of kashrus? The answer is fundamental: eating kosher contributes to both versions of the World-to-Come.

One of the primary impediments to the soul's ability to reap the benefits of Paradise and feel its connectedness to G-d is the desensitization that occurs from consuming non-kosher food. Our Sages speak of how non-kosher food dulls the mind and heart

and makes one less receptive to spiritual stimuli. In contrast, eating kosher food refines the soul, arguably more than any other Jewish practice, and allows it unfettered access to the Divine feast that the soul will enjoy in the afterlife.

In addition, eating kosher prepares us for the future Redemption in ways that are more pronounced than in any other Jewish practice. Whenever we perform a Mitzvah that involves a physical object, we generate spiritual energy that the soul could not achieve on its own. This is so because all physical objects and functions contain within them powerful spiritual energy that the soul itself does not possess.

Orderly Chaos

Kabbalah teaches us that there are "sparks" of holiness embedded in all physical objects. These sparks originate in the spiritual realm of Tohu, the World of Chaos. This world is characterized by a mismatch between the "light" and the vessels or instruments that are intended to contain and channel the light.

The light is powerful, but the vessels are miniscule and inadequate. As a result, the vessels are overwhelmed and shatter. The sparks from the energy that could not be contained shower down onto our world and embed themselves in physical objects.

Our world is the inverse of the world of Tohu. Our world, the world of Tikkun - Repaired - enjoys ample vessels but minimal light.

The objective of our Mitzvah observances is to fuse these two worlds. When we perform a Mitzvah that involves physical action and physical objects, we liberate their sparks, causing the powerful and abundant light of Tohu to flow into the ample and broad vessels of Tikkun. We then enjoy, literally, the best of both worlds: the merging of the lights of the World of Tohu into the vessels of the World of Tikkun. When that occurs, the world enters into the perfected state of existence—the Messianic Age.

While this is true with the performance of any Mitzvah, it is especially true with regard

to eating kosher. This truth is hinted at in the very word "kosher" itself.

Finding the Abundant Spoils

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn, of righteous memory, explains that **kosher** is actually an acronym for the words in Psalm 119: "*k'motzei shalal rav* - like one who finds abundant spoils." This alludes to the notion that when we eat kosher food we liberate and "capture" the powerful sparks that are hidden within the food. This process of liberating the sparks of holiness embedded in physical objects, particularly in our food, is key to refining the world and preparing it for the future Redemption by eliciting the most powerful of Divine light.

ESSAY NINETEEN

8X8

Moshiach is about going beyond one's nature.

Preparation for Moshiach requires a paradigm shift.

ESSAY NINETEEN

8X8

An Unusual Year

There is something unusual that has happened this year [the year in which this essay was originally published]. This week's Torah reading, Shemini (which means "[On the] **eighth** [day]" has been read **eight** times in the last few weeks.

[According to Jewish law the weekly Torah portion is read four times. Shabbat afternoon we read one section of next week's parsha. We repeat this on Monday and Thursday. Then on Shabbat we read the parsha in its entirety. This year, however, because the first and last days of Passover were on a Shabbos, a Festival theme was read instead of the weekly portion of Shemini. Thus, the weekly Torah portion of Shemini was read four Sabbaths back in the afternoon. Then it was repeated on the following Monday and

Thursday; once more the next Shabbos afternoon (which was the first day of Passover); again on the next Shabbos afternoon (the last day of Passover); on the Monday and Thursday of this past week, and finally once more it will be read in its entirety this Shabbos morning, for a grand total of eight times.]

There is a Chassidic maxim concerning this infrequent phenomenon: *Shmini, shmonah, shmeinah.* This play on words translates as "When we read the parsha of **Shemini** (which means eighth) **shmona** (eight) times, it will be a **shmeina** (fat or sated) year.

In other essays we commented on the significance of the number eight. Whereas seven represents the natural cycle, the number eight represents transcending the natural order.

The fact that this week's parsha focuses on the rituals performed in the Mishkan (portable Sanctuary the Jews built in the desert) on the "eighth day" of its initiation, is an indication that this day was conducive to extraordinary spiritual growth.

Likewise every year as we read this section of the Torah, we are able to draw upon this reservoir of inspiration that gives us the strength and endurance to go beyond what we thought was our limit.

What then is the significance of the theme of eight (that is relevant every year when we read the Parsha of Shemini) when it is repeated eight times?

Subjective and Objective Excellence

The answer lies in an analysis of the difference between subjective excellence and objective excellence. There are routine things that we do and there are unconventional things that we are sometimes called upon to do. It is possible for one to do the regular things with such enthusiasm and excellence that what appeared routine and commonplace has now been rendered extraordinary. This is the meaning of subjective excellence.

On the other hand, there are times that we are called upon to perform some unusual act, ("objective excellence") but we manage to

apply only normal and routine vitality and interest. In effect, we can take an extraordinary act and give it an ordinary appearance. Nevertheless, there still exists a glimmer of extraordinary energy that radiates throughout the mediocre manner of performance.

There can, however, be a third level of experience. One can perform an extraordinary act, going beyond the norm, in an extraordinary way. The act can be infused with excitement and enthusiasm, where the subjective fervor parallels the unusual nature of the act.

This then is the significance of *Shemini, shmonah shmeinah*. When we combine *Shmini (*eighth), excellent and unconventional behavior, with *Shmona* (eight), extraordinary vigor and excitement, the result is *shmeinah* a truly exceptional and "fat" year in all senses of the word. The excellence permeates all aspects of our life.

Moshiach and the Number Eight

The Messianic Age will be ushered in by

Moshiach, who is referred to in the Talmud as one of the "**eight** princes." Moshiach will usher in an age of extraordinary holiness. In the Bais Hamikdash the harp which previously had seven strands will be converted into an eight strand harp.

For Moshiach to accomplish all of this he too must be an individual, whose attitude to life is one of constant striving for self-transcendence, always seeking to go beyond the routine. Moshiach will combine personal and objective excellence; his extraordinary efforts are punctuated with extraordinary joy.

ESSAY TWENTY

PARITY

Imperfection was sewn into the fabric of our world.

Our goal, however, is to reverse that process.

This is what the Messianic Age is all about.

ESSAY TWENTY

PARITY

Confluence of Events

One of the most important days of the year is Rosh Chodesh (the first day of the month of) Nissan which is the subject of the beginning of this week's parsha. In most years this parsha is read **after** Passover. This year [the year in which this essay was first published], because an extra leap year month has been added, this parsha is read the Shabbos before Rosh Chodesh Nissan. The confluence of events (reading the parsha discussing the events of Rosh Chodesh Nissan in close proximity to that day) compels us to reflect on the importance of this day.

Prior to the exodus from Egypt, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, G-d informed Moses of their liberation and the laws concerning the very first Paschal offering.

In addition, G-d revealed to Moses how the Jewish calendar is based on the sighting of the new moon, which establishes that day as the first of the month. In addition, as noted above, the Jewish calendar also adds an extra month every few years to make up for the disparity between a lunar year (12x29 ½ days= 364 days) and the solar year (365 days). This way, Passover is always guaranteed to occur in the spring as the Torah requires.

But, this is **not** the first of Nissan the Torah discusses in this week's parsha. Here it refers to the **next** year's first of Nissan, the day on which the Mishkan-portable sanctuary was dedicated after seven days of initiation and preparation.

Upon reflection it can be demonstrated that the events of the two first Rosh Chodesh Nissans are conceptually linked. We can understand the connection between them by first gaining a better understanding of the spiritual dynamic of an added month in a Jewish leap year:

Moonlighting

The removal of disparity between the solar and the lunar systems is far more than a technical adjustment to the calendar. It also relates to the prophecy that in the Messianic Age the moon's light will be equal to the sun, as mentioned in the "sanctification of the moon" prayer we recite each month:

> "May it be Your will, G-d my G-d and G-d of my fathers, to fill the defect of the moon so that there be no diminution in it, and may the light of the moon be as the light of the sun, as the light of the Seven Days of Creation, as it was before it was diminished, as it is said: 'And G-d made the two great luminaries.'"

This prayer alludes to the Midrashic account of the creation of the sun and the moon. Initially, they were created equal, but when the moon argued that "two kings cannot wear the same crown," G-d ordered the moon to diminish itself.

However we are to understand the dialogue with the moon, it is clear that something

went awry shortly after the creation of the sun and the moon. And this discrepancy will not be corrected until the days of Moshiach.

However, whenever we create some measure of parity between the solar and lunar calendars, we get a taste of the future.

The question remains why is that considered such an accomplishment?

The Kabbalists explain that the reduction of the moon was the first step G-d took to bring imperfection, disparity, inequity and even the potential to sin to the world. While Adam and Eve were the first to sin, the impetus for that was G-d's own doing when He ordered the moon to diminish itself, thereby diminishing its ability to radiate Divine clarity to the world. Thus, any time or event that reverses that disparity is a cause for celebration because it gives us a taste of the future and provides us with a greater potential to bring an end to the pain and suffering associated with and which originated in the diminution of the moon.

We can now understand the connection between the reference to the restoration of

the light to the moon and the request we have for Moshiach in the Sanctification of the Moon prayer.

When we ask for the moon's light to return to its former glory it is our way of saying we want Moshiach because the two are intertwined. Moshiach will reverse the breaches and flaws in our world and thus the moon will radiate as strongly as the sun.

The Paradox

The question now reverses itself. Why would G-d want to introduce and impose imperfection on the world?

The answer lies in our very reason to exist. G-d created us to be sensitive to the injustices in the world and its imperfections and struggle to correct them.

In truth, when Moshiach ushers in the final Redemption, all the past suffering and pain will cease. Moreover, we will then see all of the past pain in a completely different light. We will be able to finally understand, in hindsight, why everything happened the way

it did, and how everything fit in to G-d's perfect Master Plan.

But why doesn't G-d reveal to us the secret behind all of the suffering now? Why have the greatest prophets and leaders, from Moses, Jeremiah, Job and countless others through the ages, asked to understand the reason for all the suffering and came up short?

In a now famous, powerful and emotional talk the Rebbe explained that if G-d would reveal to us now why there is suffering we would not feel the pain of others; we would make peace with it and not be moved to do anything to change it. G-d wants us to be sensitive to the other's pain and not look for ways of rationalizing it away.

And here is the ultimate paradox of Jewish thought. On the one hand we believe with perfect faith that everything that G-d does is good, and one day, imminently, with the coming of Moshiach, we will be able to see the goodness with our own eyes. However, it is our responsibility now to ignore the Divine reality that G-d chose for that person to

suffer and do everything in our power to alleviate that suffering and remove its root causes to the extent of human capabilities.

G-d's Atonement

We can now understand the radical Talmudic statement (*Chullin* 60b) that the goat sacrifice offered on Rosh Chodesh was intended for G-d's own "atonement," as it were, for His "sin" of diminishing the moon. Thus, the Torah refers to this offering as a "Sin offering for G-d."

At first glance, this is both puzzling and astonishing! How can we impute a sin to G-d?

The answer is that G-d wants us to recognize that He Himself is not fond of the disparity in the world that He orchestrated, and that it was not intended as a permanent fixture. On the contrary, He wants us to do everything in our power to reverse it! He wants us to fight against it and even pray to and demand of Him that He bring Moshiach to reverse that situation.

This is the meaning of the word sin-*chatas* that the Torah uses. It actually means a shortcoming or vacuum. On Rosh Chodesh, particularly, Rosh Chodesh Nissan, G-d wants us to increase our efforts to fill in that void and reverse the process of disparity.

Mishkan Dedication: Glimpse into the Future

We must now understand what sort of connection there is between this theme of parity between sun and the moon with the dedication of the Mishkan, which is highlighted in this parsha.

In this parsha, the Torah relates how Moses was upset at Aaron for having burnt the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice instead of partaking of it. Normally, the atonement process is made complete only after the Kohanim-Priests actually partake of the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. In the end Moses accepted Aaron's explanation for having burnt the sacrifice.

But, whatever, the explanation, the question has been raised, how could it have been that the very first Rosh Chodesh sacrifice in history was ineffective?

The contemporary Chassidic commentary, *Emunas Itecha*, provides an interesting solution to this problem in light of the foregoing analysis of G-d's need for atonement.

As mentioned, Rosh Chodesh highlights the disparity between the sun and the moon, the source of everything that is broken in our world. Furthermore, the very purpose of that Divinely ordained disparity was for us to reverse it. G-d wants **us** to restore that light and remove the disparity and the pain and suffering that exists as a consequence of the moon's diminution. In Messianic times that effort will come to fruition.

When the Mishkan was built and dedicated on Rosh Chodesh Nissan there was not just a nice and uplifting celebration. It provided the Jewish people with a taste or sample of the future rectification of the diminution of the moon and of all its consequences. That first Rosh Chodesh did not need the atonement and correction because for that one day they experienced the Messianic perfection.

Lest we think that pain and suffering will never come to an end and that we can at best only manage it, we were given a powerful lesson on that Rosh Chodesh. There was no need to partake of the sacrifice to effect atonement for G-d's creation of disparity because that situation will be corrected in the end of days.

The dedication occurred on the eighth day (after seven days of preparation), which is the very name of the parsha. Commentators emphasize that the number eight is representative of the future Messianic Age because the number eight represents transcendence. In that Age we will transcend the Divinely instituted pattern of disparity that became a part of nature.

One may add that the dedication of the Mishkan not only provided us with a vision of and hope for the future but also the inspiration, resources and power to change the disparity dynamic.

We now can see how everything connected with the timing of this parsha comes together.

This is a leap year, a sample of the removal of the disparity between the sun and the moon.

We are in close proximity to Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the day in which the calendar, with the provision of a leap year, was put into place.

The parsha discusses the dedication of the Mishkan and the failure to eat of the sacrifice to remind us of the disparity because, on that day, the seeds for the removal of that disparity were sown.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

NATURAL WINE

Judaism tolerates and even supports clearly defined parameters for consumption of wine.

However, the best way to get high is to imbibe the wine of Torah.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

NATURAL WINE

Entered Mishkan in Intoxicated State

A terrible tragedy befell the Jewish nation. Aaron's two sons were struck by a heavenly fire on the day the Tent of Meeting, the Mishkan, was dedicated, for having brought an unauthorized offering.

In the aftermath of this tragedy G-d commands Aaron:

> "When you go into the tent of Meeting do not drink wine to make yourself intoxicated, neither you or your sons with you so that you will not die."

From this exhortation our Sages derived that the sin was not just bringing an unauthorized offering but that they had imbibed wine before entering the Tent of Meeting.

After this commandment the Torah adds the following, apparently unrelated, admonition:

> "This is an eternal law for all your generations; to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean. And to be able to instruct the children of Israel regarding all the statutes which G-d has told them through Moses."

On the surface there is no connection here between not drinking before entering the Tent of Meeting and the need to distinguish between the holy and the common.

Rashi, anticipating this difficulty, explains that the need to distinguish between the holy and the common was intended to teach us that If one were to enter the Tent of Meeting in this state to perform the service in the Sanctuary the service would be disqualified. The difference between a proper service ("the holy") and an improper service ("the common") is determined by whether the Kohain performs the service while intoxicated or sober.

While Rashi's explanation deals with the simple, surface meaning of the text, the Torah can and must be understood on other levels as well. What connection is there between a Kohain not entering the Sanctuary in an intoxicated state and the need to distinguish between the holy and the common?

The following is based on an early 20th century Syrian commentator, *Peh Eliyahu* by Rabbi Eliyahu Chamvi, who explains this verse according to the method of *remez*- hints. In this method of interpretation words are understood by the acronyms they form.

When the Torah states this is "an eternal law for all your generations," the Torah here alludes to a law that deals with the way we must distinguish between secular sages and leaders and Torah sages and leaders.

Discernment between Secular and Torah Sages

The Talmud states that when a person sees one of the great Sages of Israel he must recite the blessing "Blessed is G-d who has apportioned wisdom to those who fear Him." When one sees a great secular sage he must also recite a blessing, but with a different ending: "Blessed is G-d who has apportioned His wisdom to a flesh and blood." When one sees a king of other nations he must recite a blessing, ""Blessed is G-d who has given from His glory to a flesh and blood."

The Talmud then states that it is a Mitzvah to attempt to see kings of the other nations, "for if one will merit he will be able to see the difference between the glory of Jewish kings and the glory of non-Jewish kings." Rashi teaches us that the Talmud is referring to the glory of Moshiach.

This then is the alluded meaning to the words "an eternal law for all your generations." The Hebrew word for law here is "*chukas*," which is an acronym for three

words, "*chachamim*-Sages, *katzinim*-monarchs, *tevarech*-you shall bless."

Now we see that the verse takes on a new meaning:

In every generation one should make an effort to see secular sages and leaders. The rationale for this is provided in the continuation of this verse: "to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the pure and the impure." We will thus be able to distinguish between the secular sages and the Torah sages. The secular scholars are considered common because their knowledge is devoid of a G-dly element; it is a product of human thought processes. To be sure, every human thought derives from G-d but it goes through a thick filter, which allows the Divine element within that wisdom to be obscured.

Torah sages, by contrast, are considered holy because their teachings of Torah are expressions of unfiltered G-dly wisdom.

Discerning the Difference between Secular and Torah Leaders

Similarly we are able to distinguish between the morally deficient leaders (impure) and Moshiach, the morally upright and pure leader. Generally speaking, political leaders are morally corrupt at worst and lack Divine guidance at best. Torah leaders, from Moses to Moshiach, are transparent and lead with humility and with a singular objective: to follow G-d's purpose.

Now we see that the verse alludes to the ideal leadership of Moshiach, so we can understand the continuation of the verse:

> "And to be able to instruct the children of Israel regarding all the statutes which G-d has told them through Moses."

Moshiach's role will be to instruct the Jewish people and to reveal to them the reasons for the *chukim*-the trans-rational laws, which G-d revealed to Moses in the past but concealed from everyone else. However, Moshiach, who

embodies the soul of Moses, will be able to reveal heretofore secret knowledge to all.

The Connection to Not Drinking

We still have to understand the connection between the prohibition of entering the Sanctuary in an intoxicated state and the need to distinguish between common sages and impure leaders and the holy and pure Sages and leaders.

One way of understanding the connection is to reflect on why it was forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages before entering the Temple and why the two sons of Aaron were fatally faulted for doing so.

The answer lies in a better understanding of the nature of wine. Wine, the Talmud tells us, shares the numerical value of the word sod-secret, because it is the nature of wine to cause one to reveal one's secrets. As the Talmud puts it pithily: "When wine enters out come the secrets."

Aaron's sons were trying to get close to G-d on the day the Mishkan was dedicated. They therefore wanted to drink wine to reveal their inner spiritual passion. After all, aren't we obligated to usher in the Sabbath and Jewish holidays with Kiddush over a cup of wine? What then was so wrong with drinking wine before entering the Sanctuary? Why then were Aaron's sons punished so severely because they drank wine before entering the Sanctuary? After all, the commandant not to drink wine before entering the Sanctuary was given **after** their tragic death. What sin did they commit?

The key to understanding their mistake lies in a better understanding of both the nature of the Sanctuary , the spiritual level of Aaron's sons and the significance of the day in which the dedication took place. The Sanctuary was the ultimate location where G-d's presence was revealed. The day of the dedication was Rosh Chodesh Nissan, which according to one opinion in the Talmud, is the actual Rosh Hashanah. And Aaron's sons were known for their asceticism, heightened spiritual level and incredible passion for G-d.

According to the *Sefer Yetizrah*, all of existence consists of space, time and energy. The dedication of the Sanctuary represented the convergence of the prime of all three elements. We see the concentration of the holiest people – Moses, Aaron, and his sons, in the holiest place on Earth, on the holiest day of the year all in one place and moment in time. Under these circumstances, why would they need to imbibe to be inspired? After all, wasn't it the most opportune time and place to reveal their hidden passion? Adding to the significance of time and place, they possessed the most advanced spiritual nature. Taking wine was an easy and artificial way to enhance their passion. For people of their stature, this was a grievous sin.

The greatness of Jewish Sages and leaders, particularly Moshiach, is that they neither need nor wish to use artificial techniques to be spiritual. They get it from their understanding of the Torah, particularly the secrets, the "wine," of Torah.

When we delve into the spiritual aspects of Torah, revealed through the teachings of

Kabbalah (and especially Chassidus, which makes the inner soul of Torah accessible even to the average person), we have the ability to be inspired. Taking wine to become spiritual suggests that we either don't recognize or respect the power of Torah to inspire us or that we are too lazy to do it ourselves. Drinking wine for many is no more than an unnecessary crutch. Spiritual inspiration generated by alcohol is not **our** passion; it is the alcohol that speaks through us and as soon as it wears off we revert to the same spiritual state as before. The Torah wants us to inspire ourselves by igniting our own souls with the wine of **Torah**.

No other sources of knowledge, even if they are based on sound logic and contain positive ideas, have the power to elicit our soul's inner soul and passion. Even if they could, it would not be the soul's natural means of finding expression. It would be akin to taking an unsanctioned remedy which can have many side effects because it was no intended for us.

Only Torah, particularly, the inner soul of Torah, is the natural means to touch and ignite our soul's passion.

And only the true Jewish leaders are able to assist us in revealing that passion because, unlike secular leaders, the souls of true Jewish leaders, particularly, Moshiach, are organically connected to us. When they ignite their passion it enables us to do the same. Just like medications administered to the head or heart can beneficially affect other organs, similarly, when our spiritual head or heart is inspired it affects all of the soul, because they are all connected to the brain and heart soul.